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On the cover



DIATRIBE

Bi women: we're here and we're queer, says Louise Carolin

WHY WE LOVE...

Lesley Kershaw is a comedian with heart

→ SUSAN CALMAN

Why no one can tell the out comedian to be "less lesbian"

OUR STORY

DIVA readers Robin and Jo on life in the Salvation Army

JOAN NESTLE

The writer and thinker talks borders, belonging and lesbian identity

ADERONKE APATA

The award-winning role model calls for changes to the asylum system

SHABANA AZMI

The film Fire changed Davina Shah's life. Now she meets its star

HOW TO BECOME A LESBIAN

The authors of a new book say any woman can be a lesbian

/ C SILVANA IMAM

The out lesbian rapper from Sweden talks to Bella Qvist

/ PORTFOLIO

Sadie Lee unveils a new series of erotic paintings

/ GAMING EVE-OLUTION

Is the world of video gaming putting its misogyny behind it?

FIRST LADIES OF SPOKEN WORD

The queer women who are changing the poetry world

ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS

How to tell if you're in one, and what to do if you are

EASTENDERS LESBIANS

Luisa Bradshaw-White and Rebecca Scroggs on their onscreen relationship in the long-running soap FOCUS: CHRISTMAS

A VERY RUBBISH CHRISTMAS

Sarah Westwood goes home for the holiday

"DON'T STOP EATING"
Our six-point seasonal

survival guide

A VERY LEZZY CHRISTMAS
Looking for the perfect present?

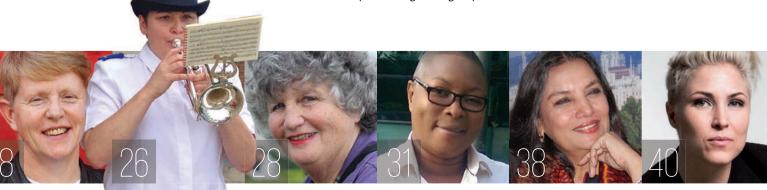
These independent lez/bi producers have just the thing!

FEELGOOD FESTIVE
Grooming ed Joanna selects

the best ethical beauty gifts

APPY CHRISTMAS!

Tech ed Rhoda makes easy work of your Christmas shop







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access this complementary content when you purchase our digital edition from divadigital co.uk or directly through the DIVA branded app, available on the App Store, Google Play, Kindle Newsstand and Windows Store. (Please note that additional content may not be available via all of our third party digital suppliers. However, buying the issue using one of the methods above will give you access to this content.)

HUMOUR & COMMENT

COLUMNISTS

DIVA regulars Jay Bernard, Susan Calman, Charlotte Cooper and Sarah Westwood

COMIC

Kate Charlesworth's Put A Ring On It

PICK 'N' MIX

Including Mediawatch



Photography LEZLI+ROSE

JFESTYLE

LISBON

Discover a better class of hostel in Portugal's capital city

CITY GUIDE: WASHINGTON

The American capital is a fine destination for a gay getaway

FIRST CLASS

Travel tips to help you plan your holidays

SCENE: CHICAGOS, ESSEX

Chelmsford's where it's happening, plus My Scene: Birmingham

THE QUICKIE

Sexy short stories by DIVA readers

SEX/LIFE

Late-blooming lesbians talk about coming late to lesbian sex

GROOMING

Get the low-down on the upkeep front

WELLBEING

Depression may be a natural part of life, but you needn't suffer alone

LEGAL

From December civil partners can convert to same-sex marriage

TECHNOLOGY

Resident geek Rhoda Meek on the best Christmas apps

More lez/bi listings than you can shake a stick at

REVIEWS

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MAGAZINE

EDITOR'S LETTER

Plus, how to get in touch

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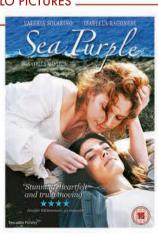


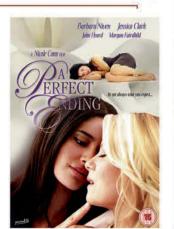




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EDITOR'S LETTER



It may still be a few weeks away but Christmas will soon be upon us and for those of you who haven't yet giftwrapped your Xmas haul, we've got a few suggestions for you, crafted (by hand, in many cases) by lesbian and bi business women (p64). What's more, we've given the festive season a queer twist with musings from the Rubbish Lesbian (p22) and Carrie Lyell's tips for surviving your family this Christmas (p24). On a more serious note, fans of Eastenders will already be aware of the disturbing storyline involving lesbian couple Tina and Tosh that

will come to a head over Christmas (p56). Domestic abuse is an issue that affects many of us and we hope that our feature this month will help those who face it (p52). Depression and anxiety are common at this time of year (p91) and suffering from the "Black Dog" alone can make it feel much worse. DIVA readers are a supportive community and, likewise, here at DIVA we try to actively engage with our sisters. That's why DIVA's Louise Carolin has set up Hi Bi! - an online bi visibility project (p14). Wherever we can we try to publicise the amazing work of our community's campaigners, such as Aderonke Apata (p31). Finally, if you fancy giving the gift of DIVA this Christmas, why not buy a gift subscription from divasub.co.uk? Not only will you save almost 25%, but you'll also receive a free DVD, Reaching For The Moon (p10). Or, if you'd prefer to load up someone's brand new iPad with something special, you can gift a digital subscription via divadigital.co.uk.

> Jane Czyzselska **DIVAMAG.CO.UK**



NEXT MONTH: THE FUTURE ISSUE on sale 18 December

Rose & Rosie – Exclusive shoot & interview with the YouTube couple sensation

Best. Lesbian. Year. Ever. 2015. The preview Lesbian elders tell DIVA about their hopes, plans & fears Readers who are changing their lives in 2015 Twisted sisters: the drag gueens we love Ariel Schrag on her controversial new book, Adam Anna Chancellor & Miranda Richardson in Mapp & Lucia

Jillian Michaels – the US the fitness guru visits the UK

CONTACT US!



Got an idea for an article?

Email edit@divamag.co.uk and tell us all about it



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ould make Christmas a cracker for you?

Editor Jane Czyzselska

"A break from Facebook and Twitter

Deputy editor Louise Carolin

"A bi-positive storyline in the Downton Christmas special"

Editorial assistant Carrie Lyell

"A aift-wrapped Beyonce, Failing that, a nice Christmas jumper" Designer Fernando Safont

"If suddenly animal fat and sugar were healthy stuff"

Music editor Sarah-Jane Roberts Books editor Eden Carter Wood

Film editor Joanna Benecke Travel editor Lucy Fry

Diary editor Dora Mortimer

Art editor Anna McNav Sex/life editor Anna Sansom

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Star Letter OUR WONDERFUL BODIES

Congratulations. The photo-shoot in the November issue was absolutely fantastic. Seeing those lovely women showing their lovely bodies was very inspiring. As a young girl I was a bit of a tomboy and played a lot of sport until my late teens and was very conscious of my body. I was very wary of my body shape until my early 30s. After having two children in my late 30s, the shape of my body changed and over the years everything has gone south. Regardless of what shape or size our bodies are, or how we adorn them with tattoos or piercings, our bodies are a wonderful thing and we must love and respect them.

I also enjoyed the article about older lesbian lives. I came out when I was 41, shortly after my marriage break-up. I have been with my partner for nearly 19 years and I am nearly 61. My children are now in their 20s and they adore my partner and treat her as a second mum.

PAULA, NORTHAMPTON

DISABILITY: NO HURDLE TO ADOPTION

We were saddened to read the letter from Sara (November) who believes she is unable to adopt.

As Sara correctly points out, the path to adoption is necessarily thorough, robust and inten-

sive. If applicants have a disability or illness this would be assessed in the context of meeting the needs of children and young people, along with any potential impact upon their health. Applicants should receive individual consideration with evidence and information being collected from their consultant/doctor. The assessing social worker would then need to consider the "what if's?" in relation to support networks and the impact on the child/young person.

Every local authority is required to have a Medical Advisor who sits on the adoption panel and who will advise on the impact of any disability or illness on applicant's capacity to parent. They are also available for consultation to assessing social workers during the assessment.

Finally, the adoption panel is made up of a number of people, professional and independent, all of whom have had experience of adoption. The recommendation whether or not prospective adopters should be approved to adopt is not made by a single person, although the final "decision" is made by the Agency Decision Maker.

Anyone over the age of 21 can apply to be assessed and if Sara and her partner still wish to consider adoption, they could go back to the agency they went to before and ask them to consult with their Medical Advisor or they could apply to any other adoption agency.

CHRIS ATKINS, TRAINER CONSULTANT - BAAF SOUTHERN

A NIGHT AT THE THEATRE

My fiancee Jayne and I went to see Breeders at St James' Theatre, London on DIVA's recommendation. It was a treat for my 21st birthday and I have to say it was absolutely amazing! We thoroughly enjoyed the brilliant humour and sincere, emotional storyline. We laughed, cried and cheered throughout! It was a great evening with a wonderfully varied mixture of people in the audience. We just wanted to say THANK YOU, DIVA, for a fantastic evening!

EMILY, DORSET

WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHER

We're writing to express our delight with our wedding photographer, Kerry Woods (kerrywoodsphotography.com). We weren't initially going to have a photographer as we didn't want to be scouring the earth for one that we felt comfortable with, due to the wedding being a gay one! Then we came across a local photographer who was new to the trade, who we gelled with and who didn't treat us any differently than she would a straight couple, so we decided to use her.

Kerry works the whole of the North-West, but is based in Lancashire. As well as making us feel 100% comfortable, the pictures that we have received from her do not disappoint; we couldn't be happier with them. Here is a link to a little blog she has done on her website about us, and you can see some of the pictures from our wedding: tinyurl.com/muttu86.

We recommend her to all DIVA readers who are looking for a fun and friendly service.

LISA & KERRY TAYLOR FAY

CORRECTION

In the November issue of DIVA we mistakenly referred to our makeover star as Julia instead of Stephanie. We apologise for this error and any confusion it may have caused.



This month's star letter prize comes from the folks at Momiji. Inspired by friendship and kindness, each Momiji doll

contains a secret hidden card for your own handwritten message or wish. They make wonderful gifts for someone special...if you can bear to give them away. Why not have a go at collecting them? With over two hundred different characters, they're kind of addictive.

lovemomiji.com









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@TheOuting1

#bodyconfidence @DIVAmagazine is beautiful. Our bodies are ours to own, love all the tattoos too #BeYou.

@ScaredOfGirls

Enjoyed Jay Bernard's column, more from her please!

@IntervalThinks

Smashing new issue of @DIVAmagazine, esp piece on @HouseOfBrag.

@SarahAliceShaw4

Finally got my hands on the latest @ DIVAmagazine. So excited to find @ VickiCartagena inside. I love #ReneeMontoya!

@SallanderPup

So @DIVAmagazine has added #cartoons to the mag. Loving it!

@axiomaticalice

Beat anxiety today to walk into town and buy new issue of @DIVAmagazine - can't wait to

hide in it!

@LizzieMurray88

Just subscribed to @DIVAmagazine finally after getting sick of my local stores not stocking it #lesbianfrustration #hotwomenontap.

Join us today!

@hellospacething

My sister does buy me the most awesome birthday presents: 1 year @DIVAmagazine subscription. #lesbian #LGBT #Diva.

@ACGreenPython

October @DIVAmagazine has been my favourite issue ever! If Best of the Fringe left you craving more funny women, check out @ womenincomedyuk.

@MaryamBibiDin

Just read @Imaan_LGBTQI article in @ DIVAmagazine and I'm super impressed. 15 year anniversary and more visibility! Visibility saves lives.



tell us about her relationship with DIVA.



Name Aimee Galbraith

Occupation Currently unemployed

Lives Broadstairs, Kent

Identity Lesbian

What made you start reading DIVA?

I stumbled upon DIVA by reading about it somewhere. On my next outing after, I found it in the supermarket and have been buying it ever since.

How long have you been a reader? Since early 2014.

Print or digital?

Print, so the memories last longer.

What do you like best about DIVA?

My faves are the reviews pages and the Pleased To Meet You section, but I like the whole magazine, cover to cover!

What would you like to see more of?

I would like to see more readers' stories, how they met and if it worked, etc. And maybe the occasional poster...!

How many people read your copy?

Myself and my mum! She is very supportive of me!

What happens to your copy when you've read it?

It goes into the pile with my other copies, but I plan to get boxes to store them in.

Who would you put on the cover and why?

I would put the OITNB cast on the cover because the show is the best thing around at the moment! Or maybe just Laura Prepon and Taylor Schilling because... Well, just because!

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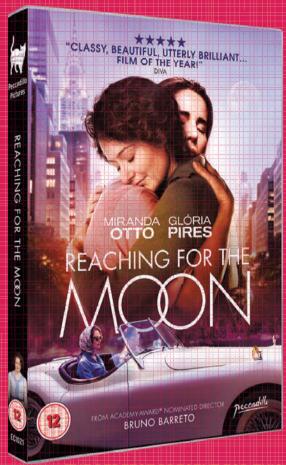
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Set at the height of 1950s glamour, this audience award winning drama recounts the extraordinary relationship between Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Elizabeth Bishop (played by Miranda Otto, Lord of the Rings) and Brazilian architect Lota de Macedo Soares (the beautifully handsome Gloria Pires). In search of inspiration, Bishop leaves America having accepted the invitation of an old college friend to stay with her on her sprawling country estate in Brazil. But she never counted on meeting the love of her life - her friend's partner.

At first, the fiery personalities of the two women collide and lead to passionfuelled debates, but animosity quickly turns to attraction, then desire. From Oscar-nominated director Bruno Barreto. REACHING FOR THE MOON is an intimate portrait of two remarkable artists as they discover the most incredible love.

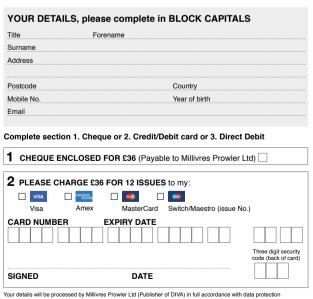
DVD extras include an interview with director, Bruno Barreto.



Thanks go to Peccadillo Pictures for providing all DVDs.



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HOW TO CHANGE THE WORLD

THE REVOLUTION WILL IGNITE IN KNOYDART, WITH LESBIANS ON THE FRONTLINE. AND THERE WILL BE NO WINE BARS, SAYS JAY BERNARD



This magazine has mourned the passing of many queer establishments, and the latest at the mercy of developers is London's Royal Vauxhall Tavern. At the time of writing, there are

rumours of an anonymous buyer who plans to turn the first floor into a wine bar. What that means for the other floors is undecided, though anyone looking at this story would be forgiven for giving them a gloomy prognosis. It's not that we don't like wine bars, it's just that everything is a wine bar. I can't walk down the street without tripping over a wine bar. I was in Brixton once and was swept along by a protest against a wine bar. The lady who announces everything on National Rail declares that passengers can only alight from the front eight coaches because the other two have been turned into a wine bar. The other day I had to go to A&E for a back problem and the ambulance was themed like a wine bar. The paramedics - private, because our superiors think it makes financial sense to sell off public services then rent them back at double the rate - were wearing little black aprons. I asked for codeine. I got grenadine.

Sucking miserably on my NHS-funded

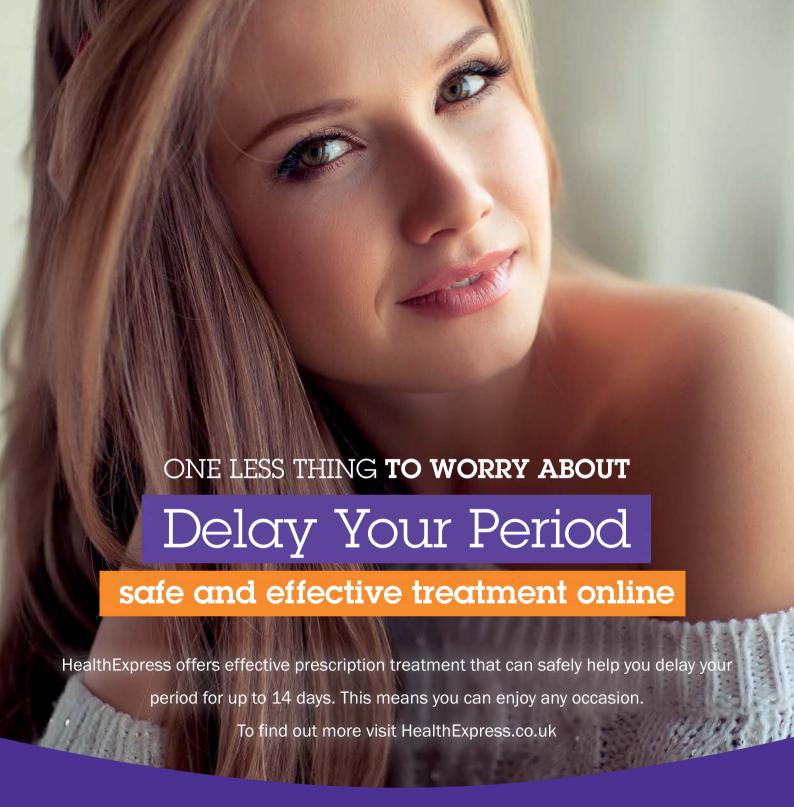
Shirley Temple, I cast my mind over the litany of institutions that existed in my youth. I will never stop mourning First Out, which is now a Japanese buffet. Sometimes I stand at the window, in the rain, and curse their every dumpling, for the window seat was where I sat, once, with a group of Vespa-heads and poets, and plotted a lesbian breakaway from

I once sat in First Out plotting a lesbian breakaway from the UK

the UK. We manoeuvered bits of lasagne around the plate to indicate our strategic positions and decided that, for whatever reason, Plymouth was the place from which to bring down the government. One of us did sailing in sixth form, another had been a lifeguard and one had an ex who worked at the Met Office, so we figured that was enough to take on the Royal Navy. Our mission? To have some space. To break free from the shackles of luxury flats. To create somewhere more interesting by virtue of the fact that we would have created it ourselves, and to do this in the spirit of the great lesbian tradition of heading out into the wilderness to Build Shit. Some around that table argued that we'd be abandoning our metropolitan heritage and everything

we'd worked for; others argued that it was bolder to go forth into the unknown and create the change we wanted to see.

So I have some suggestions. The first phase of our campaign could be Croydon, notorious for its four-thousand-strong warehouse parties and feature in the Shit Towns anthology. It's conveniently close to Norbury - where I did frolick as a child - which has become a haven for the displaced. I propose the patch of scorched earth residual from the riots. The next phase could be the Welsh Valleys. In the aftermath of the film Pride, I expect we'll be greeted by nostalgic miners' wives who will be able to point us to the nearest crack town. We'd have a solid 20 years before the Valleys were reclassified as London's Zone Three, and the boys in blue were sent to throw us out. Finally, with beefy chops, we'd be ready for Knoydart, Britain's last remaining wilderness and home to the nation's most remote pub. True, history tells us that lesbians are wont to bloody infighting, particularly after prolonged exposure to clean air and a full moon, but I actually think that would be better than paying rent to a faceless Singaporean company that has bought up half my neighbourhood. Who needs the so-called centre, when we can have the glorious Everywhere Else and fill it with co-ops and guerilla dyke assault courses. And think of the perks: no wine bars. •





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HI BI!

LOUISE CAROLIN INTRODUCES DIVA'S NEW BI VISIBILITY PROJECT WITH A PERSONAL STORY



I came out in 1986, when I was 19. I came out as a lesbian because girls, right? But also because, looking around me, I couldn't see a single out bisexual role model nor any kind of support

that made embracing a bisexual identity look like a practical option.

In those days everything was "lesbian and gay". If you've seen the film Pride, you'll know what I'm talking about. I knew about groups for young lesbians (and older lesbians), I knew about Lesbian and Gay Switchboard, Lesbian Strength and Gay Pride. I didn't know about any organisation that would have helped me to claim a place, as a bi woman, in the brave, brilliant gueer world I wanted to be a part of. I'm not saying these people and organisations didn't exist - I know now that they did - but they were invisible to me. I remember quite clearly having the thought: "I will fall in love with a man or I will fall in love with a woman, and then I will be either straight or gay." The notion that I might not have to choose was an anathema to me - as it was to most of the world.

I fell in love with a woman. I went off to college, bold in my brand new lesbian identity. At college, I joined the Lesbian and Gav Soc, attended NUS Lesbian and Gay Conferences and learned that bisexual issues were "completely different" and that "they" should organise alone. I watched when our lesbian Women's Officer threw a bi woman out of a Gay Soc disco. Bisexuals should party alone, too. I made myself unpopular for supporting bi inclusion when I stood for the post of

Lesbian and Gay Officer (although I won). I fell in love with more women and I fell in love with being a lesbian, with the friendship and support of my peers, all these bad, beautiful girls and our desire to change the world. They were my gang, and you needed a gang in 1988, when Section 28 declared our relationships "pretended" and there were no positive images on TV, or in the papers. Belonging was all-important and as young lesbians, too often our identity was established against what we were not, and we were not bisexual.

Bi women are here, at the heart of lesbian communities

I didn't feel conflicted. I knew I could be attracted to men but I never was. As a feminist, I believed that being a lesbian was a valid choice - it wasn't necessary to examine my desire in order to determine what I "really" was. Besides, almost every lesbian I knew except for me had some kind of sexual history with men or a soft spot for a male pop star or actor; if they didn't call themselves bisexual, why should I? Especially when saying, "Hi, I'm bi!" would have resulted in ostracism.

It was not until 2000 that I came out again, as bisexual. Emerging, shattered, from a long relationship, in my early 30s, I decided to challenge my ideas about myself. For me, experimenting sexually with men was, oddly, one of the most lesbian things I've ever done. Everything I'd learnt as a dyke about challenging rules and being true to myself came into play. This time, however, I was older and more sure of myself; I didn't need a gang to back

me up. The culture had changed: we were LGBT now, not L&G. I had friends of all sexual persuasions who were mostly unphased by my identity U-turn. A few people tried to tell me I was straight, but I put them right. My job at DIVA helped; so did 15 years of lesbian activism and cultural production, working mostly for no money to make magazines before there was much commercial gay media.

And this is why I take it very personally when bi people are described as mere "bandwagon-jumpers", hanging on the coattails of the "real queers". Those rights you have? We helped fight for them. This magazine you're reading? We helped make it happen. That bar you loved? One of us ran it. Bi women are here, both at the heart of lesbian communities and at their margins, as we have always been.

Now, as a feminist, I see my bisexual identity as a valid choice. We are as queer as anyone - our identities as threatening to the heteropatriarchy's as any lesbian's. Read Shiri Eisner's rabble-rousing Bi: Notes For A Bisexual Revolution, if you want proof of that. And we are becoming more visible but we're not there yet, which is why DIVA is launching a new online project aimed at increasing bi women's visibility within the wider LGBT community.

Hi Bi! is our place to introduce ourselves, share information and resources that have helped or inspired us, and celebrate our diversity and all the different stuff we do. If you identify as bi, or pan, or anything else that means you can be attracted to more than one gender, come and say hi! Because we're here, we're queer - and we're all kinds of awesome. **O**

divahibi.tumblr.com

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BEWARE YOUR DREAMS

CHARLOTTE COOPER REALISES HER DREAM OF BEING A ROCK STAR - AND FINDS OUT IT'S NOT ALL LEATHER JUMPSUITS AND COCAINE PARTIES.



And so we come to the latest chapter of my life: I have just released an EP called Sunshine with my band Homosexual Death Drive. It's our first but it's actually

been a long time coming. Its roots are in adolescent me in my bedroom singing Pat Benatar's Promises in the Dark, which I notice now has a queer subtext to it that I never twigged back in the day. Around the same time I secretly wrote a musical based on the Ziggy Stardust album, featuring characters I knew at school. I would be Bowie, natch, and I'd show everyone at Wembley High how to freak out in a moonage daydream on the way to Suffragette City!

Fast-forward several decades and my dreams of being a rock star are finally happening, sort of. But it hasn't really turned out as I imagined it would when I was a precocious young girl. We don't perform to crowds of thousands, I don't have a leather jumpsuit, there are no guitar solos. Sometimes we get paid a bit but it's not enough to cover a cocaine party on a pretty lady's backside. People seem to like us and everything but no one's demanding to make plaster casts out of our fannies, not yet at least. But what I have in Homosexual Death Drive is a funny project with a weird name that enables me and my

girlfriend to get away with a lot of bad behaviour. God, it feels so freeing to stop being so nice once in a while! People think we're going to be French and Saunders when we take the stage until we deliver our opening line: "Hello, we are Homosexual Death Drive and we've come to fuck your girlfriends."

I want people to feel something when we play. Something strong.

The music matters, but we are not musicians in the traditional sense. Our main instruments at the moment are a swanee whistle, a recorder, a child's accordion, home-made electronic effects made by my boyfriend, cheap loops and apps on an iPad. We don't rehearse regularly, have no interest in virtuosity or playing the usual band circuits, but our songs are alright. We sing about things we care about - survival, anti-social pleasures, queer love and life – but the point of the band is to create a memorable spectacle. I want people to feel something when we play or when they listen to us and I don't care what it is as long as it's strong. Audience members have walked out, others have wept, sometimes I see people beaming at us with joy. I love it when women stop looking at their boyfriends and turn their faces towards us.

When you make something you become part of something. We have occasional excursions into performance art but Homosexual Death Drive is embedded in a gueer DIY music scene that includes performers like Verity Susman, Trash Kit and Shopping; nights like Scumbag; the wonderful Power Lunches venue; and journalists like Charlotte Richardson Andrews. We cross-pollinate like crazy, showing up for each other and delighting in what we make. Though my own band is a strange entity, I feel supported and at home within this ramshackle, mixed-up, non-corporate queer and feminist scene.

We have a lot of fun with the Death Drive and I think this is because we do everything ourselves, We are answerable to no one. Showbiz is important to us and we carefully plan our outfits and movements, and the mood of each song. We make our own videos and merch and have been developing a shoddy aesthetic; we just write our band name and the words "Official Merch" on bits of tat knocking around. Once we sold some Homosexual Death Drive bananas. We are launching the EP by taking a lucky competition winner on an actual Homosexual Death Drive to a mystery location in my girlfriend's Nissan Micra. We got some blank car flags for the occasion and I'm going to draw skulls and sad women's symbols on them. Enter our competition and it could be you on the back seat. **O**

charlottecooper.net/homosexualdeathdrive charlotte@divamag.co.uk





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FUNNY WOMAN

0

NORTHERN. WORKING CLASS. BUTCH. LESBIAN. DIVA LOVES LESLEY KERSHAW

Whether she's on stage on a Friday night at her local British Legion club or at a lesbian arts festival, Lesley Kershaw is a new comedy voice to be reckoned with. Cleverly observational and self-deprecating, her comedy routine has heart and speaks of an experience rarely articulated on the circuit. DIVA first

came across Lesley at this year's LFest and my how we tittered. Talking us through her recent full hysterectomy, after which she was forced to wear a nightie on a gynae ward – a rum do for a butch lesbian – where the woman in the bed opposite hers mistook our Les for her long-dead husband, was just one of many hilarious stories she shared with us. We caught up with her to ask her why standing on stage telling jokes to complete strangers makes her heart race. She blames it on the menopause. Now she's over 50 and

she's been round the block a few times, she says she feels more open to new adventures than ever. "After my hysterectomy I was told I had a fantastic pelvic floor and it was only a matter of weeks before I could manage some light dusting. And a spot of dogging." Ok, so she lied about the dogging but the rest is all true.

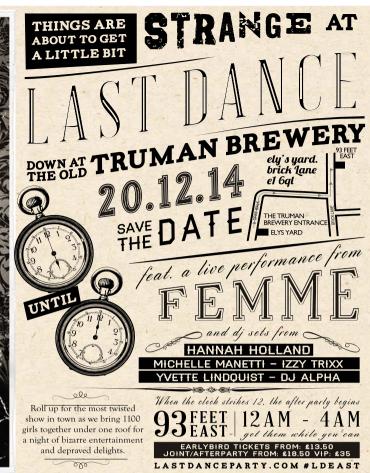
Catch Lesley Kershaw with Jo Enright and Kerry Leigh at the Laughing Cows comedy night at The Gregson in Lancaster, on 29 November, 8pm.



ADDITIONAL CONTENT AVAILABLE IN OUR DIGITAL EDITION SEE PAGE 4 FOR INFORMAT

SEE PAGE 4 FOR INFORMATIOI divadigital.co.uk









CAN I BE LESS LESBIAN? NO!

FOR 20 YEARS SUSAN CALMAN BOTTLED UP THE TRAUMATIC EVENTS OF HER TEENAGE YEARS. NOW NOBODY CAN TELL HER TO KEEP QUIET



I'm at the start of a very long tour of the UK. I mention that not as an incredibly clumsy plug for my gigs (although you are, of course, more than welcome to join me at any of venues

I'm playing) but simply by way of background. The shows are going well and audiences seem to enjoy what I'm saying, but there are, as always, the occasional complainers. Last week a man in the audience was overheard in the interval asking if the second half was going to be "less lesbian". Initially, when I heard what he said, I started to question just how lesbian I'd been in the first half. I mean, I talk about my life and experiences but I don't walk out wearing dungarees and holding a poster of KD Lang. I didn't have time to find the gentleman in question after the show to ask him exactly what he meant, and, to be honest, I've been stewing about it ever since. I know that he can have no idea what a chain reaction his flippant comment set off in my head, but I decided to write this column by way of reply.

When I was 16 I was in a very bad place. I knew I was gay but I didn't know anyone else who was. I felt isolated and unable to cope

with my feelings. And so I started, as many do, by cutting myself, something I haven't done in many years but did fairly frequently at the time. And more seriously, I took an overdose. It makes me shudder just thinking about it now, I'm more embarrassed than anything else about what I did. I was taken to hospital, had my stomach pumped and recovered. But the event had lasting consequences.

<u>I took an overdose.</u> I shudder just thinking about it now

One of them was that I decided to never, ever tell anyone how I felt again. After my overdose I was forced to spend time in the youth unit of a psychiatric hospital. If you've never been in one, and I sincerely hope you haven't, it's truly one of the most terrifying places you could ever find yourself in. I was locked in a ward with seriously disturbed people, when all I wanted was for someone to tell me that everything was going to be ok. That being who I was was ok. That life was worth living.

I was so utterly traumatised by the experience that I spent the next 20 years of my life keeping my mouth shut. Not telling anyone how down I felt because I never wanted to be

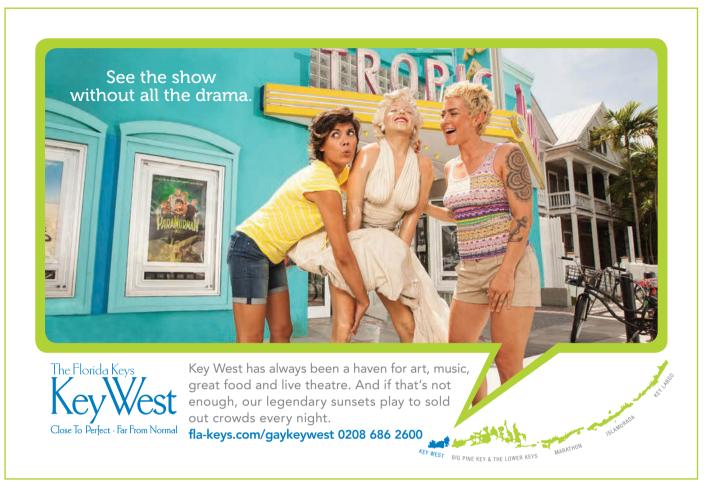
put back in that ward, with those people, ever again. A year ago I went to see a counsellor who diagnosed me with post-traumatic stress disorder. Initially I couldn't talk about it without crying, and I couldn't even think about what happened without being sick. With her help I talked through it, after I made her promise that she wouldn't section me for being honest.

Now I can think about that time in my life and the positives that it has left me with. And there are some. It's left me with more empathy for those who struggle with their own thoughts and sexuality, but also a strong desire to reach out to people. I'm gay and if I don't talk about it then I'm still that frightened girl in a hospital, unsure of who she was. I know exactly who I am now. And if, by talking about it, I make people uncomfortable then sod it.

So the answer to that man in the audience is no. I will never be less lesbian. I will always be who I am, on stage, off stage, at the shops, on a train, wherever, I will never be frightened of being who I am. And while I can, I'll make sure no one else feels that isolated.

I'm also toying with calling my show next year, Susan Calman: Less Lesbian. Maybe he'll come and see it, although somehow I doubt it. 0

See susancalman.com for full UK tour dates.



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A RUBBISH CHRISTMAS TO ONE AND ALL!

IN THIS VERY FESTIVE COLUMN, SARAH WESTWOOD LEARNS THE TRUE MEANING OF CHRISTMAS



Last Christmas Eve, my girlfriend and I made the epic one-and-a-half-hour journey from London to the Midlands by train. We arrived at Euston laden down with four bags

apiece and a Carluccio's Panettone, which came in a cumbersome hexagonal hatbox and was at the special request of my mother. So it was with some difficulty that we squeezed ourselves, our luggage and our elaborately wrapped Italian dessert onto an already replete carriage. Opposite us was a man with two stressed cats in carriers piled one atop the other in the gangway and the third on his lap. Across the aisle was a strung-out woman with a bunch of noisy children. The carriage was full and everyone was a nightmare. This miserable menagerie on rails crawled northward, all four children whining, three cats a-yowling, two lesbos tutting and a Panettone in a lovely box. Then, just as we arrived at our stop, a dog passed through the carriage, passed wind, and trampled on our precious Panettone, possibly out of spite. Merry effing Christmas.

Around this time of year I always wish I could be on a beach in the Caribbean, on a space station in total isolation or, failing that, in my own home - just the cat, myself, and my girlfriend. Instead, every year I head home to Stoke for a week with my family. Don't get me wrong, I do enjoy watching a load of Strictly celebrities dancing around in spandex for eight hours at a time with a bunch of snoozing second cousins. My preferred diet does consist of Twiglets and nuts previously handled by a small, sticky child, and a jar of pickle from the back of my mum's cupboard so old it's seen more Christmases than I have. There's nothing that I enjoy more than the sound of my own creaking knicker elastic as I exhale on the couch after yet another round of crisps and a flagon of wine, a precursor to night three of Ben Fogle in the Arctic odyssey. Then it's to bed in my chilly teenage bedroom with a copy of Adrian Mole and a Five Star poster looming down on us. Hello heartburn, my old friend.

Every year I head home to Stoke for a week with my family

In the absence of being called up by NASA, I dream of one day spending Christmas at home in London. Imagine that, an actual grown-up Christmas? Just like the ones I used to drool over in festive movies, where a lovedup couple in thick fisherman knits cosy up in front of a roaring fire and clink Champagne glasses. Do you know why that couple are celebrating? Because they haven't been sent back to Morrisons for the third time that

day to queue once again with mass humanity for another useless item that someone's forgotten to pick up, or a panic purchase we'll never need. "Oh, can you nip back and get me some Paxo, eight pints of milk and three dozen sausage rolls - just in case Mildred pops round?" They haven't been ordered down the garden to the garage fridge, in their pyjamas, in minus-20 wind chill, on the hunt for a fabled bottle of Bishop's Finger for an inebriated uncle who insists he won't touch anything else.

So it was that after hours of anticipating these and other annual delights, and in a state of post-journey fatigue, we arrived gloomily on my mum's doorstep last Christmas. "Cup of tea?" she asked. "Oh, thank Christ," said my blasphemous girlfriend as we both deflated over the threshold. Suddenly we felt grateful to be there. At that very moment I learned the true meaning of Christmas: if you've got to spend a week indoors with other people, fishing Celebrations wrappers out of your navel, let it be in the company of your own family. We dragged our bags in and gasped in admiration at the Christmas tree. I looked down to find a Twiglet in my hand. Then from the kitchen my mother's voice carried through, "You did remember the Panettone?" •

Coincidentally, Sarah Westwood's book, The Rubbish Lesbian: Selected Columns, is available now at divadirect.co.uk and makes a fantastic Christmas gift.





























PICK'N'MIX

CELEBRITY TWEETS

@evanrachelwood

Happy #nationalcomingoutday. Love and support to all who still struggle with the fight to be who you are.

@sueperkins

Thanks to Twitter, I have now learned that the collective noun for ladybirds is 'a loveliness of ladybirds'. Ahhh...

@katemoennnig

I now know what life is like after the Breaking Bad finale.

@heatherpeace

It's weird sitting next to a stranger, in the dark, both of us sobbing and then the lights come up. Thanks @PrideMovie you had me in bits.

@Carrie_Rachel

Woke up to the news that my band #sleaterkinney is getting back together and that we have a new record coming out in 2015.

@lspraggan

I am impossibly excited to be back on tour in November. And to show you NEW ALBUM material!

@EllenPage

Using religion to justify bigotry makes me sad. Sending my support to the LGBT students at the school who I hope are able to find acceptance.

@JanelleMonae

Am I vegan, vegetarian, or eating that bbq soon as I touch down in Memphis?

@JillianMichaels

I just learned that when you flash someone the peace sign in the UK it means F*&! Off. This would have been good to know a week ago. Oops.



A massive thank you to everyone who nominated us as News Service of the Year at the Ultimate Planet Awards earlier this month. We were delighted to pick up our prize at a glitzy ceremony in central London alongside so many other inspirational women. Check out planet-london.com for the full list of winners.

WE WON

PERSON OF THE MONTH SALLY MORGAN



Props to TV psychic Sally Morgan who last month sacked her husband and son-in-law from her business after their anti-gay rant at one of her critics, reminding us that we must challenge homophobic behaviour wherever it occurs – even in our own families. When video footage emerged that showed them using threatening behaviour and homophobic language, the celebrity clairvoyant immediately distanced herself from husband John Morgan and son-in-law Daren Wiltshear, saying she was "ashamed and devastated". She added: "Neither of them will have anything to do with my work, my business, and right now I honestly have no idea what is going to happen to my marriage." Good for you, Sally.

WE LOVE.. THE FINEST BUBBLE



Nothing says Christmas like a bottle of fizz, and this is the best fizz around. The Finest Bubble is a premium service specialising in rare, prestige Champagnes, perfect for making the festive season sparkle. They offer same-day delivery in London or next day for the rest of the UK, and if you've left your shopping until the last minute (again), don't

worry - they'll even gift wrap a bottle for you. But at £1,795 for a bottle of Krug Clos d'Ambonnay 1998*, you better make sure she's worth it.

*cheaper bottles are available! thefinestbubble.com

MEDIAWATCH

WITH CARRIE LYELL

LOW RISK DOESN'T MEAN NO RISK



What do lesbians do in bed? N<mark>o reall</mark>y, it's a genuine question. Because no one ever told me. To be hones<mark>t, I've just</mark> been guessing all these years so for all

I know it might be completely wrong. I can only apologise to my previous sexual partners, but don't blame me - blame the education system and its systematic failure to provide LGBTinclusive sex education.

Inaction by most schools has let us all down regardless of sexuality, but for queer people, that feeling is even more acute. For as bad as sex education was at my school - and it was abysmal - at least we got a rudimentary idea of the whole penis in vagina thing. Don't get syphilis and don't get pregnant and you'll be fine. If I'd asked then, "What about the lesbians?" I would have found myself in detention quicker than you can say blueberry-flavoured dental

A recent survey shows that, sadly, things haven't improved a great deal in the years since I left school, LGBT issues are rarely, if ever, discussed in sex education, with 89% saying they learned nothing about bisexuality and 94% saying the same for transgender issues. And although we heartily support QX editor Cliff Joannou pushing to make the SRE - It's My Right campaign LGBTI-inclusive, his open letter makes no explicit mention of lesbian or bisexual women.

That may be because sex between women is relatively low-risk in comparison to men who have sex with men, but sexual illiteracy affects us both physically and emotionally, and as the case of HIV transmission between two women in the US earlier this year proves, low risk doesn't mean no risk. We deserve to be included in this conversation, too. Maybe then we can finally put that age-old question to

bed. @Seei

tinyurl.com/DIVAeducation

HOW TO....

SURVIVE CHRISTMAS WITH THE FAMILY

CHRISTMAS CAN BE MAGICAL, BUT LET'S BE HONEST, IT VERY RARELY IS. ESPECIALLY IF YOU'VE SPENDING IT WITH YOUR HOMOPHOBIC GRANNY OR THAT RACIST UNCLE, BUT NEVER FEAR, DIVA IS HERE TO SEE YOU THROUGH TO THE NEW YEAR INTACT

MANAGE YOUR EXPECTATIONS

We know what you really want is an iPad Air, but bless your mum, you never get guite what you ask for, do vou? Prepare vourself for socks and a Nando's gift voucher, then you won't be disappointed.

DRINK

Eggnog, sherry, mulled wine or creme de menthe that's been at the back of the cupboard since before vou were born: it doesn't matter. A little tipple will fill you with warm feelings. Don't worry about the hangover – what do you think Boxing Day is for?

DON'T STOP **FATING**

Is your uncle banging on about immigrants and Ukip again? Find solace in 18 pigs in blankets, a whole Terry's Chocolate Orange and half a trifle. If you're lucky, you might just pass out before the Queen's speech.

GO WITH THE FLOW

It doesn't matter what want to do, you know you're going to end up building a 1000-piece 3D jigsaw of Battlestar Gallactica with your geeky nephew. Don't fight it. You never know, you might even enjoy it.

TAKE A COPY OF DIVA

If things get too much (they will), you can always lock yourself in the bathroom with a copy of your favourite magazine. Your rellies might think you've got a dicky tummy but who cares?

REMEMBER WHAT **CHRISTMAS** IS ALL **ABOUT**

Distress, wretchedness, hardship and suffering. Another eggnog? Go on then.



"THE SALVATION ARMY DOES NOT DISCRIMINATE"

DIVA READERS ROBIN AND JO CONTACTED US AFTER WE PUBLISHED AN ARTICLE THAT DESCRIBED THE SALVATION ARMY AS HOMOPHOBIC. NOW THEY PUT THE RECORD STRAIGHT INTERVIEW RACHEL CUNLIFFE

DIVA readers Robin and Jo Peacock are lifelong members of the Salvation Army, a Christian church and charitable organisation founded in 1865. Briton Jo met American Robin two years ago. They married in 2013 and live in North Carolina, USA.

JO, 45

Robin and I grew up 4000 miles away from each other, but when we met we felt like we knew each other already. We had the exact same upbringing and the Salvation Army has always been part of our lives. I'm a fourth generation Salvationist, and neither of us has ever known anything else, so it's hard to express how important it is to us. When we see someone struggling across the road, one of us is going to run over and help, so it's a competition who gets there first!

We're no different to any heterosexual couple in the Army when we get up on Sunday mornings and go to church. Sometimes we get the odd question from people: "You're a little bit different from everybody else, what do you guys do when you go home?" And I answer sarcastically: "Well, we go and do our lesbian shopping at the lesbian Walmart, then we come home and cook our lesbian dinner." But for the most part no one bats an eyelid.

In fact, we get more prejudice from the LGBT community when we're out in our uniforms than we do from within the Army. We do carol playing at Christmas, and quite often you'll see lesbian couples walking into stores where we're stood outside. They'll make some comment, and I'll say: "Have you met my wife?" The LGBT community thinks the Salvation Army is homophobic, so they assume that we're straight. There's an assumption that there's no way the Army would encourage or accept us.

In contrast, the Salvation Army is all about

showing God's love through the way we act. We don't care if you're an alcoholic or a drug addict, we don't care how you live your life, all we care about is helping people. When I was a kid LGBT issues were never spoken about, we just treated everybody the same. And then as LGBT issues became more prevalent and we started getting more vocal as a community, it still didn't make any difference in the Army. So there was no positive discriminatory statements, but there was nothing negative either. It's all about who you are as a person, not about sexuality.

"We get more prejudice from the LGBT community than we do from the Army"

You need to be able to look at this from a 21st century perspective and understand that being a Christian is about showing Christ's love, behaving as Christ did, and Jesus didn't discriminate against anybody. And I think that's why I think the Army is overall a positive influence on society, because when it comes down to it, we treat people as people, and not as labels.

ROBIN, 24

Jo and I met at an Army funeral, of all places. We both play in the band, and we were asked to accompany this event. When I turned up I wasn't in uniform because I'd forgotten about the funeral, and the first thing Jo said to me was, "Where is your uniform?" It was history from there.

I've had relationships with people outside of the Army, and it's harder, trying to explain things that are so basic to you. Maybe we're a little bit too giving, but that's how we were brought up, to put other people's needs ahead of our own. Ok, it might inconvenience me, but sure, I'll help you shave your cat or whatever. As Salvationists, that's what you grow up doing. But other people don't always understand that.

Of course, there's still some discrimination within the Army, a handful of backward officers. We had some friends who were junior officers, and they were pretty much told to sever ties with us by one of these dinosaurs. But they really stood up, they showed him all the position statements and they refused. I think those experiences really show not only what the Salvation Army is, but also what Jesus teaches: tolerance, love and acceptance.

I remember the uproar when [Australian Salvationist] Major Craibe made inflammatory anti-gay remarks in 2012. It's in our mission statement that we don't discriminate, so to make a statement like that is insane. You may personally think homosexuality is a sin (you're wrong, but you're allowed to think that), but he also broke rules and regulations. He spoke on behalf of the Salvation Army, and that's simply not who we are. William Booth founded the Army because the other churches weren't treating people the way Jesus teaches. Major Craibe was let go shortly after that, so we wasted no time in getting him out of there.

It's very frustrating when people, especially in the LGBT community, just take the word of one person and don't do any further research. We all know how it feels to be oppressed and discriminated against, so why would you spout that venom at other people? If you're confused about our marriage and the Army, ask, do some research. Don't assume we're supporting an organisation that hates us.

As for why I believe the Army is a positive influence, that's easy. The Salvation Army puts Christ's message into action: love and serve.

COURAGE OF THE LESBIAN HEART

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A LESBIAN ON THE BORDERS? WRITER AND THINKER JOAN NESTLE TALKS ABOUT SOME OF THE THEMES THAT EMERGED DURING HER WORK AS GUEST CO-EDITOR OF LESBIAN LITERARY AND ART JOURNAL SINISTER WISDOM'S PROVOCATIVE NEW ISSUE INTERVIEW EDEN CARTER WOOD

For myself, feminism is as necessary as air. The discussion of the end of feminism makes no sense to me. It isn't a dead body of thought. I hear from friends who teach that some younger women say, 'We're not feminists, we're not lesbians'. I think it means that young people are finding their own kinds of feminisms and their own way of being a gendered person in the world. As long as a young woman says, 'I will risk safety. I will risk family connections. I will risk the offered comforts of the known way to find a place in the world for my self which allows me to be the fullest person I can be', that's feminism. It's women thinking for themselves, trying to make sense of a war-filled world.

I'm a 74-year-old Jewish femme lesbian and to be a lesbian now means, for me, considering how connected we are to all the other kinds of struggles: for liberation, against heartlessness and the economic regimes. We need a coalition, not just of different organisational, political groups, but of generations, of ways of thinking. This is the time to break open our definitions while keeping our sense of histories alive.

When you talk about lesbophobia, you have to deal with race and class. You could say that America loves its white upper-class lesbians: Ellen, Dick Cheney's daughter [Mary Cheney]. I don't think we can sort out one identity in our society any more without looking at the others. If you're poor, a woman of colour, a lesbian: yes, I think there's lesbophobia. It all depends on how we are marked by our dissent from a national narrative of success.

For me, one of the things about being a lesbian is asking how does the government under which I find myself living care for those who need help. I lived in New York City for much of my life and I was lucky enough to live on the Upper West Side from 1974 to 2002. I visited recently and I could barely walk the streets, I was so upset. I saw more homeless people than I have seen in 30 years. I saw men and women walking in rags on the street, sleeping on church steps. I saw them huddled against buildings, and on these buildings there were placards: Apartment: \$17 million. It's a vertical gated community. In all my years, I had never seen such things. Such prices. Such discrepancies. Something is going to explode in our societies, because this cannot go on.

I have known my Sinister Wisdom co-editor Yasmin Tambiah for over 25 years. We were very involved in different ways in the boundary and border struggles of our time, and in editing the Lesbians And Exile Issue we wanted to expand the concept of exile. It's about home and loss. It's about the ways of thinking and of the heart that stand with one at the border. It's also about dissent; when one speaks out against the prevailing offered comforts of a powerful society, or even a fragmented one, that complex stance of being a lesbian becomes even more truly complex. What is lesbian positioning at the borders? What does it mean to be a lesbian traitor to a nation state? These are the issues we are trying to raise.

What does it mean to be a lesbian traitor to a nation state?

From the start there were three women whose voices I had in mind. One was Yasmin herself, and another was Samar Habib, who wrote an anguished and powerful piece on the different exiles she has endured being both a lesbian and a Palestinian, and Lepa Mladjenovic, a Serbian lesbian who works with anti-nationalist groups. I wanted to have those voices and in the process of editing we discovered other wonderful voices.

It used to be that we would say that to be a lesbian was to be an exile in many different ways; Yasmin and I don't think that's true anymore. There is a movement towards the centre, towards normalisation. I call it the politics of deprivation, when you're not allowed to do something for so long and then the government says, 'Oh well, maybe we'll let you' [and the response is] 'Yeah! We want to be married. We want to serve in the military! Yeah!' And all the other politics goes out the window.

Sinister Wisdom doesn't usually do such politically-weighted work, so in a way Julie Enszer, the general editor, took lots of risks with this issue. It's not an easy issue but it's provocative and revealing of different courages of the lesbian heart. There was some trepidation about the essay I wrote, in which I come out in support of the boycott, the divestment and sanctions against Israel. Julie, the editor, is a Jewish woman, we do not share a politic on this, and I have to say that she was wonderful. She accepted difference. She never raised the issue of trying to change. There are generosities of the heart and of thinking, and the history of lesbians thinking is as important as the history of lesbians touching.

Sinister Wisdom 94: Lesbians And Exile is available now. sinisterwisdom.org



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RECENTLY COMMENDED AS A POSITIVE **ROLE MODEL AT THE NATIONAL DIVERSITY** AWARDS, ADERONKE APATA TELLS HER STORY INTERVIEW CARRIE LYELL

In 2004 I fled Nigeria, a country where gay and lesbian people are politically persecuted, imprisoned and murdered, fearing for my life, and sought asylum in Britain. In Nigeria, I was forced into an arranged marriage to hide my sexuality. When exposed, I was arrested, tortured and extorted by homophobic police, and I received death threats from vigilante groups who brutally murdered my partner.

I have been in the UK now for over 10 years. I have many friends in my community and this is where I now know as home. I am in a relationship with another Nigerian woman, but the government still refuses to acknowledge that I am a lesbian and I'm currently under the threat of forceful deportation back to Nigeria. I have garnered almost 32,000 signatures online for my campaign to remain in the UK, and I also fight tirelessly for the freedom of others, challenging the government and legal system that penalise the many LGBT refugees seeking asylum in the UK.

Radical changes need to be made to the asylum system

The injustice and hypocrisy in the asylum system is not just restricted to LGBT applicants - it goes across the board. However, LGBT people face a disproportionate level of intrusion, humiliation, mistreatment and refusal of their applications, and radical changes need to be made.

When I was announced as winner of Positive Role Model in the LGBT category at the National Diversity Awards last month, I couldn't believe it. I just shook my head, blessed God and was humbled. It was an emotional moment for me, and I am very grateful and proud to be a winner of this prestigious award. It shows that all of the work I carry out, supporting myself and other LGBT asylum seekers, is recognised. I dedicated my award to all of those people facing persecution over the world due to their sexuality and who they choose to love.

The NDAs are a celebration of the achievements of people from under-represented backgrounds who dedicate their lives to enhancing the equality agenda, hence it is very important. We need more honourable and prestigious awards such as these. Since winning the award, I have been appointed a patron of the Proud2Be project in Devon, and I'm on the board of trustees for the amazing Broken Rainbow charity that serves our community in the area of domestic violence (see p54 for more about Broken Rainbow's work). It is a huge responsibility, which I am looking forward to serving. •

Sign Aderonke's petition at causes.com/asylum-for-aderonke.



WILDBIRDS & PEACEDRUMS

Rhvthm

Written, recorded and produced in their new Stockholm studio, Wildbirds & Peacedrums' latest album is an exercise in minimalism, joy and raw power. Stripping their music back to just drums, beats and vocals, it's an exhilarating and deeply rhythmic affair. Some songs wander into tUne-yArDs territory, adding layers of vocal chants over primitive beats, whilst others flirt with no-wave and digital R&B, marrying lean and muscular beats with dirgey melodies and loops. Play loud. Close your eyes. Move your body. Surrender to the rhythms.



IAMAMIWHOAMI

Blue

Over the space of two albums, Sweden's iamamiwhoami has established herself as one of electronica's most imaginative artists. Another audiovisual gem, Blue marries beautiful videos with catchy synth-pop. Think big melodies, shimmering synths, crisp beats and euphoric loops topped with shape-shifting vocals.



LILY & MADELEINE

Fumes

Like First Aid Kit, Lily & Madeleine specialise in rich, perfectly executed folk-pop. Fumes, Can't and Hold On are all heartbreaking melodies, restrained guitars and lush vocal harmonies, whilst Cabin Fever, The Wolf and Lips & Hips add rich strings and taut arrangements.

3 BEST TRACKS:



SLEATER-KINNEY – Bury Our Friends

Portland's finest trio return with a power-pop gem that marries chugging bass and drums with a

killer chorus and ace vocals.



SNOH – Bad Thinas

Swedish singer Snoh duets with Common on this seductive, slo-mo number driven by shuffling beats

and her cool, bluesy vocals.



ZOLA JESUS – Go

Forget chillwave, Diplo's remix of Go transforms it into a dancefloor bomb that revolves around

chopped drums and ZJ's crystalline vocals.

ESSENTIAL R&B & HIP: MARY J BLIGE

The London Sessions

Mary J Blige demonstrates why she's the best singer of her generation with this sublime collection of new songs. Right Now and Long Hard Look deserve to be dancefloor bombs but it's Therapy and Whole Damn Year that will leave you reeling. Immense.

SON LITTLE

Things I Forgot EP

As you might expect from his collaborations with The Roots and RJD2, Son Little's debut EP is infused with old skool hip-hop. Nestled between his dusty grooves and low-slung blues however, you'll hear stomping blues, raw, Philly soul and shuffling R&B driven by digital beats and electric guitar. Promising stuff.

DOWNLOAD THIS: I AM LIV

Special / Closer

British newcomer Liv pays homage to vintage and contemporary R&B on her debut tracks. Special is a minimal soul number based around piano, handclaps and gorgeous, smoky vocals whilst Come A Little Closer layers her arresting vocals over chopped beats, sirens and throbbing bass. More please.

IF YOU LIKE FOLK: **CHRIS WHILE & JULIE MATTHEWS**

Who We Are

Former members of the Albion Band, While & Matthews celebrate their 20th anniversary as a duo with this collection of new folk and Americana songs. There are uptempo numbers with foot-tapping guitar, banjo and percussion alongside more melancholy acoustic ditties that showcase their timeless vocal harmonies.



DVD IDA

My Summer of Love director Pawel Pawlikowski's award-winning film centres on a young nun in 1960s Poland who seeks out her aunt and discovers a dark family secret. Black and white, long pauses, arty shots; slow or subtle, you decide.

On sale 24 November

LGBTQI ON DEMAND FILMDOO

This online platform is the place to discover and watch queer movies! It's pay-per-view, so no subscription fees, and if you just want film suggestions - or to connect with other users that's totally free.

FilmDoo.com

GROUNDBREAKING INDIAN DRAMA MARGARITA, WITH A STRAW

Shonali Bose's fantastic movie centres on Laila, a young Indian woman with cerebral palsy, who moves to New York and falls in love with a blind lesbian. Fingers crossed for UK distribution soon!

Watch the trailer at tinyurl.com/ **DIVAMargarita**

ONLINE

DOCUMENTARY

Unfinished film about LGBT people taking on leadership roles in the Church. Donate to help complete it!

outoforderdoc.com

ACTIVISM UNI LASS

In response to the misogynistic Uni Lad page, Uni Lass was created to promote gender equality and educate students about what it really means to be a feminist.

facebook.com/UniLass

BI VISIBILITY SO YOU'RE **STRAIGHT NOW?"**

Bi women in LTRs with men discuss their experiences of everyday biphobia in this Buzzfeed article.

tinyurl.com/DIVABiBuzz



THIRD PERSON

Dir Paul Haggis

Haggis's films are always low on the sense of humour, but with Oscar-winner Crash I could just about buy the pomposity, as the subject matters (racism, poverty, crime) were justifiably heavy. When it's rich white people getting stressed in a posh hotel, however, the slow-mo, OTT orchestral strings and blatant attempts at emotional manipulation (care, audience, care!) are harder to forgive. It's difficult to say anything about the plot without "ruining" it, suffice to say I was angry, bored, disappointed - and at one point incredulous at the crass explanation for Olivia Wilde's character's "behavioural issues". Not least because Wilde, Mila Kunis and Maria Bello deliver performances that are far better than this self-satisfied film deserves. Get these actors a better movie. Preferably in the first person, rather than seen through the resoundingly male gaze of Haggis.

In cinemas 14 November



BONOBO

Dir Matthew Hammett Knott

In this rom-com a single mother goes to extract her daughter from a commune where the members are trying to live like bonobos (awesome apes who create matriarchal societies where sex is used to resolve conflicts) - and ends up learning something about her own sexuality. I'm not going to tell you what I think of the film because I co-wrote it, so that would be way nepotistic, but if vou're interested in seldom-seen middleaged lesbian narratives, conflict resolution and/or bonobos, this could be right up your street. Raindance audiences seemed keen! Tessa Peake-Jones (aka Del Boy's missus) and Josie Lawrence (Enchanted April) star, with supporting turns from James Norton and Eleanor Wyld.

In cinemas 5 December



THE CIRCLE

Dir Stefan Haupt

Based on the true story of The Circle (Der Kreis), the gay community which emerged in Switzerland after WW2, this unusual film blends present-day documentary interviews with re-enactments. Teacher Ernst Ostertag and hairdresser/singer Röbi Rapp - who met through The Circle in the 1950s and are still together today - are the main focus, appearing both as themselves and as characters played by actors. Homosexuality was not illegal in Switzerland, so The Circle was able to exist fairly peacefully until a "gay murder" sparked media interest. While the shaky camera is slightly annoying and the acting isn't flawless, the insight into gay life in Switzerland is by turns surprising, upsetting and ultimately moving.

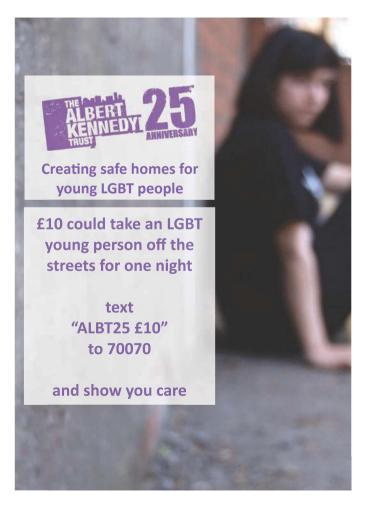
In cinemas 5 December



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A FILM BY KATE JOHNSTON & SHAUNA MACDONALD

THE STATE OF THE STATE OF



IN CASE YOU MISSED IT... TRANSPARENT



If you've not seen this incredible Amazon original series yet, now is the time to get involved. Written by the brilliant Jill Soloway (Six Feet Under, United States of Tara), it stars Jeffery Tambor (Arrested Development) as Maura, a transgender woman who comes out later in life. We were hooked in minutes - you will be too.

Watch now at amazon.co.uk/prime

OUT ON DVD WENTWORTH PRISON



Looking for a stocking-filler for your boo? Nicole da Silva might be a little big, but this will fit nicely. Relive the highs and lows from season two of this unmissable Aussie prison drama which had us all gripped when it hit our TV

screens in September. Best thing to come out of Australia since Natalie Imbruglia.

Wentworth Prison, season two, is out on DVD on 24 November

TV NEWS IN BRIEF REMOTES AT THE READY

January sees the return of some of our favourite shows, including The Good Wife, Lost Girl, Silent Witness and Last Tango in Halifax. We'll keep you in the

know so you don't miss a thing.

JRDILLION,

Looking forward to Cucumber and Banana? Us too. And even more so now we know Sue Perkins (right) penned an episode of Banana, which hits E4 in





MAPP AND LUCIA

If you're looking for something to watch with the family this Christmas, we've got just the thing. Adapted by Steve Pemberton (The League of Gentleman), this threepart comic drama starring Miranda Richardson and Anna Chancellor celebrates and lampoons the snobberies and pretensions of small-town life. Based on EF Benson's novels, Mapp (Richardson) and Lucia (Chancellor) are social rivals, pitted against each other in the summer of 1930 when Lucia decides to take a holiday in the charming historic town of Tilling. And there's a lesbian character too, played by none other than Gemma Whelan (Game of Thrones). Perfect telly whilst you tuck into that leftover trifle (PS Don't miss DIVA's set visit, next issue!).

BBC1, Boxing Day



WHAT WE'RE WATCHING MODERN FAMILY

Forget Christmas shopping: make some quality time for the Pritchett-Dunphy-Tuckers in everyone's favourite comedy because, with Christmas around the corner and the smell of chestnuts roasting on an open fire, they'll soon be off on their mid-season festive break. If you've not seen the previous seasons (where have you been?) or want to enjoy them again, get yourself on Netflix now and enjoy binge watching over the holiday season.

Mondays, 8pm, Sky 1



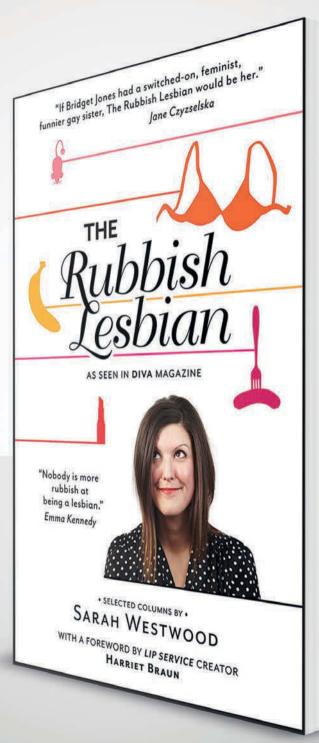
WE CAN'T WAIT FOR... ORPHAN BLACK

Great news for sci-fi fans! Production has begun on the third season of BBC America's smash hit Orphan Black, starring the gorgeous Tatiana Maslany. Season three plunges the clone sisterhood, all played by Maslany, into unexpected territory with the realisation that they're not alone. Just when they thought they knew their enemies and allies, we find out that our clones are more vulnerable than ever before.

BBC Three, spring 2015

DIVA direct.co.uk

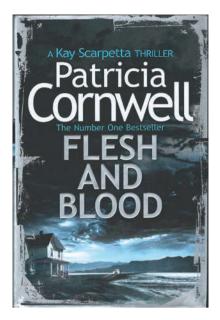
THE RUBBISH LESBIAN



FUNNY, HONEST, AND DISARMINGLY REVEALING ABOUT HER OWN INSECURITIES;

POPULAR DIVA MAGAZINE COLUMNIST SARAH WESTWOOD GATHERS TOGETHER A SELECTION FROM

HER HILARIOUS BACK CATALOGUE WITH SOME EXCLUSIVE NEW MATERIAL.



BOOKS

CRIME FICTION

FLESH AND BLOOD

Patricia Cornwell

This twenty-second book in the hugely successful Scarpetta series finds the iconic forensic psychiatrist's birthday dinner of grilled swordfish steaks, an elaborate panzanella salad and fresh Bloody Marys interrupted by a murder nearby. The brutal killing of high school teacher Jamal Nari sends our espresso-loving sleuth on the trail of a serial sniper nicknamed Copperhead, a foe able to kill apparently random victims with seemingly impossible shots. With the help of her lesbian technogenius helicopter pilot niece Lucy and longtime sidekick Detective Pete Marino,

Scarpetta follows a trail that takes her from New Jersey to Massachusetts, and then to a shipwreck off the coast of Florida.

A solid, well-written crime thriller, Flesh and Blood contains all the elements readers have come to expect from a Kay Scarpetta novel: loving descriptions of food preparation and Kay's horny husband FBI profiler Benton, a clever and seriously twisted killer, plenty of technology and a lot of unfolding information to test your grey matter.

Harper Collins, £20, ebook £13.39



CRIME FICTION THE

INFORMANT

Susan Wilkins

Meet newly-released excon Kaz, her lawyer Helen with whom she shares a strong mutual attraction, and determined copper

DS Nicci Armstrong. Gay author Susan Wilkins' TV writing credits include EastEnders and Corrie; tough female characters and a lesbian protagonist make her action-packed debut a great option for crime fiction fans.

Pan Books, £7.99



QUEER HISTORY EATING FIRE

Kelly Cogswell

Subtitled My Life As A Lesbian Avenger, Eating Fire is American journalist, activist and blogger Cogswell's detailed memoir of 20 years of mobilising,

marching, fire-eating, flyer-distributing dyke activism. Those with a keen interest in the Lesbian Avengers' achievements, including their role in establishing Dyke Marches, will find this an invaluable historical document.

UMP. £15

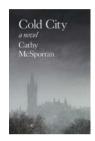


FICTION **GWENDOLEN**

Diana Souhami

Acclaimed biographer Souhami turns her considerable talents to a debut novel, a retelling of George Eliot's Daniel Deronda in the voice

of flawed heroine Gwendolen. Flirtatious, charming and accomplished, Gwendolen tells her tale of courtship, marriage and heartbreak in a novel drenched in passion and lush description. Quercus, £16.99



FICTION COLD CITY

Cathy McSporran

Committed to a psychiatric institution following an overdose, Susan vacillates between a medicated reality and an icy, repressive alternative

Glasgow where her gay brother is married to a woman and Christian fundamentalism rules. A well-told, compelling and very wintery tale about repression and mental illness, Cold City is worth a visit. Freight Books, £8.99



LIFE STORIES BRIGHTON TRANS* FORMED

Ed, Sam Carroll A nicely-presented

collection of testimonies from some of Brighton's trans residents, who tell their life stories and discuss some of the issues that affect them in their own words. Topics include the NHS, gender binaries, finding intimacy and the media; this book offers an important snapshot of the seaside city and its trans community. QueenSpark Books, £15

Tips for writing teen fiction



- Get a writer's journal and carry it everywhere. This is where you will keep all the scribbles and doodles that will eventually become your novel. Plus, it's a good excuse to splurge on pretty stationery, and it makes you feel all writer-y.
- People-watch whenever you can. Listen to the way teenagers speak and watch how they act. Taking notes will help you write natural and believable dialogue and characters later.
- Read teen magazines. They provide you with an invaluable link into the current, ever-changing world of the teenager.
- Go there. If there's something you really want to write about but you're scared of what people will think... you absolutely have to do it.
- If you can, ask a teen to read a draft of some of your work and get their feedback.
- Finally, never give up. When it feels like no one is interested and you're ready to set fire to your manuscript... keep going. Trust me.

Rai Jayne Hearse's YA novel The Life and Loves Of Cherry Bakewell is out 28 November. 10p from every copy sold via Rai's website will be donated to Stonewall. raijaynehearse.co.uk



Sisters-in-love

LANDMARK LESBIAN FILM FIRE, ABOUT TWO SISTERS-IN-LAW WHO FALL IN LOVE, TRANSFORMED DAVINA SHAH'S LIFE. NOW SHE GETS TO MEET THE WOMAN WHO IGNITED THE CHANGE

n autumn 1996 I was an oblivious teenager battling with awkward feelings, unaware of an important film being screened at the London Film Festival. That film was Deepa Mehta's Fire, starring actress and champion of social justice Shabana Azmi and co-star Nandita Das.

Fast-forward a few years and I am hanging onto a heteronormative lifestyle by a thread when my boyfriend decides to rent Fire on VHS – probably from Blockbuster Video's World Cinema section.

I can remember watching intensely as the love between two sisters-in-law blossomed into a passionate love affair within a close-knit Indian family. Fire acted as a catalyst for a chain reaction of emotions beyond my control

Months later, I blurted out of the blue, "I think I might be gay!" Needless to say, my relationship ended and the characters of Radha and Sita became a symbol of hope on my journey to lesbianhood.

So when I heard that Shabana Azmi was in the UK recently, on tour with Rifco Arts Production's play Happy Birthday Sunita, I seized the opportunity to interview her about the film that helped change my life.

I met the elegantly dressed actress at the Montcalm Hotel in London's Marble Arch, where she explained why it was so important for her to play the role of Radha.

"The first reason I wanted to do it was because I really liked the script and I believed that Deepa Mehta would make it sensitively and not sensationalise it. The issue [of lesbianism] had not been touched upon in mainstream cinema particularly and everyone would behave as if it didn't exist by brushing it under the carpet." She hoped people would relate to the two sisters-in-law in a same-sex relationship: "Instead of the normal reaction

of being afraid of the other, you could maybe extend that empathy to the other."

The response from the LGBT community was "huge", as Shabana exclaims. "Overwhelming, people were so pleased that somebody was talking about the issue and dealing with it in a sensitive manner. It also became a sort of cult film in that sense and was taken to a lot of universities and a lot of discussions around it happened."

"People were so pleased that somebody was talking about lesbianism"

There was some criticism around how the women fell in love. "Some said it seems this was a choice being made because the men ignored them, but the fact is it can just be."

It is clear that the bohemian actress has no issues with labels or playing gay. "In fact, I found it very interesting because we were asked by a member of the audience at LFF if the three of us were lesbians." Shabana tosses her long, black hair to the side and chuckles infectiously. "Yes, they actually asked us if we were lesbians. I said, well, if we have convinced you that we are, then we have done a good job."

Although she is a pioneering actress of Indian New Wave Cinema, known for its realism and awareness of social issues, I wondered if Shabana was nervous before shooting the more intimate scenes with Nandita.

"Of course I was. When we were doing rehearsals, Deepa put us in the kissing scenes very early on, we were definitely awkward and she said, 'Come on, stop fussing, the two of you, and just behave like two professionals'."

Shabana believes it was more difficult for

Nandita as it was her first film. "Deepa said, 'You are supposed to be touching her lips, not brushing her teeth', she was so matter-of-fact about it."

Deepa was careful in ensuring that just the bare minimum crew was there when the very physical scenes were filmed. "When you are doing it on screen, it is also a very technical thing because you have to make sure the camera catches you, so it is all that that you get involved in. It was very beautifully done."

Dubbed the Meryl Streep of India for the variety of diverse roles she has tackled in the course of her career, Shabana anticipated the controversy that surrounded the film. "I did realise that it would be controversial, but I also figured that not all of India's audiences are a monolith." She expected that people would react in different ways. "Some people would get disturbed, some would get angry, some would be overwhelmed and some would be very grateful, and that's exactly what happened."

Shabana believes art should be used as an instrument for social change. "It started a conversation and that is what is important and what a film can do, the fact that you bring the topic out in the open and discuss it."

Finally, I want to know, where does Shabana envisage Radha and Sita now? "I am sure that they would run their own fast food joint and they would be so good at it. I think they would turn out to be very savvy and maybe even more successful."

I often wonder how my life would have turned out had I not watched Fire at that crossroads in my life. I could easily have found myself in Radha or Sita's shoes. Luckily for me, I met the woman of my dreams a year after coming out to my boyfriend. We celebrated our tenth anniversary last year.



JULIE BINDEL HAS GOT A LOT OF FLACK FOR SUGGESTING LESBIANISM CAN BE A POSITIVE LIFESTYLE CHOICE. NOW SHE'S MET TWO TOP LEZZERS WHO HAVE WRITTEN A BOOK ON TURNING LESBIAN BY FOLLOWING A SIMPLE 12-STEP PROGRAMME

A Short Guide to the Art of Becoming a Lesbian (Liten handbok i konsten att bli lesbisk), by Mian Lodalen and Matilda Tudor, was published last year by Leopard Förlag, an independent publishing house based in Stockholm. I met both authors at a feminist conference in Malmo, Sweden in May as they were promoting their book in the lobby. Wondering what the massive queue was for, and hearing loud laughter and animated chat, I approached the desk to find Mian and Matilda holding up tshirts and bags emblazoned with slogans such as, "Damn! I wish I were a lesbian".

The queue consisted of women of all ages and persuasions buying the book and asking Mian and Matilda for autographs. I asked if they would tell DIVA their recipe for lezzerism, and they were only too willing to oblige.

"You can read our book without becoming lesbian but will be radicalised"

Mian, a journalist and gay activist of 30 years, was the first out lesbian in Sweden. "I was pretty alone when I came out," she told me, "but eventually more and more women opened up and we became more accepted."

Matilda is younger than Mian and admits to being starstruck when she met her at a party. The two soon bonded "over wine and cigarettes" and found they had a lot in common, such as a commitment to animal rights as well as feminism.

"Everything started the way it usually does - with a party. The guys had sprinkled themselves all over the apartment and the balcony, while the girls were crowded together in the tiny kitchen," laughs Mian. "All these straight girlfriends, sighing, 'If only I could be just a little bit lesbian..."

"One day I was talking to a famous Swedish feminist and she had had a terrible day and was asking why on earth women can't just be lesbians," interrupts Matilda. "I had the idea that we should have a workshop on how to do it."

The women approached a publisher with a synopsis and she loved the idea. "She said to us, 'Never back off during writing this as it is quite radical, and we never did," Matilda tells me.

We move on to the thorny subject of the "gay gene". "I don't think anyone could force me with a gun to be straight," says Mian. "And there are straight women who could never be lesbians. But there are all those women in the grey area."

According to Matilda: "It is cowardly to say that we are born that way and we can't change. We are told it is bad if we say you can change from one to the other because we make the argument that helps those that want to convert us

"But we are saying that sexuality is not as static as it is often argued. In a patriarchal society many women would [gain] advantage from being a lesbian. It is quite simple in a way.

"It's lunatic to keep going in straight relationships when you know how bad it is. It's like a bad habit. It makes you sick, you're losing money. It's dangerous. You're not even having conversations in the bedroom. You have this discrimination in society, you have this discrimination in your own home."

So how does the 12-Step Programme approach work? "It's not like you can watch The L Word and understand everything about queer culture," says Matilda. "But I think that if you're put in a position when you're watching that you can identify with lesbian desire, you will."

Matilda is keen on giving lesbian fashion advice to potential converts. "Maybe it could be a good idea to dress down, a little bit. If you like being a girly girl, that will be ok. But if you really like to blend in, maybe it's a good idea to favour jeans and sneakers."

"I think few people would be able to openly read it for a laugh... You can read it without becoming a lesbian but will be radicalised. It can be some kind of spark in their relationship to demand their rights in the relationship.

"This is the most common sexual fantasy amongst Swedish women. Women are also more willing to experiment.

"So you and your husband have a fantastic

and equal relationship, and still it doesn't feel good. So shall we hear what your cunt has to say about it? And then, 'Oh, holy mother of god, somebody's actually speaking to me'."

The book is amusingly illustrated and set out in a way that enables the reader to dip in and out, "A bit like those women who fancy trying out lesbianism," laughs Matilda.

Chapters include, Welcome to Heteroholics Anonymous, The Flip Side of Heterosexuality, The Straight Trap, and a description of a first lesbian encounter, Like Winning the Lottery.

Unashamed propagandists for the joys of lesbian sex, the authors are particularly proud of the sections, Women Have No Problem Coming, Just Not with Men; The Promised Land of Dykes; and, my personal favourite, Heterosexual Women Come to Heaven -Dykes Come Over and Over Again.

"First you have to realise you are not straight," says Mian. "Practise your gaydar, learn to love your cunt, and then get yourself some lesbian culture."

Netflix is perfectly acceptable, says Matilda, for accessing lesbian film and documentary, but ultimately you will need to go to a lesbian club and take a holiday to Lesbos.

"Come on girls," laughs Mian, "get with the programme!" **D**

Should women whose sexuality lies in the "grey area" aim to become lesbians? See Diatribe p14.

BECOMING A LESBIAN IN 12 STEPS

Mian and Matilda offer would-be lezzers the following programme to follow in their bid to discover their inner dyke...

- 1. I admit I have been powerless over men – that my life has become unmanageable.
- 2. I have come to believe that a power greater than my own – like a righteous, feminist dyke community can restore my sanity.
- 3. I made a decision to turn my will and my life over to a solid butch, or any other lesbian with plenty of experience.
- 4. I am making a searching and fearless feminist inventory of myself.
- 5. I admitted to myself, and to at least one other lesbian human being, the exact nature of all wrongs in

- my previous choices.
- 6. I am entirely ready to ditch all the crazy ideas that have been put into my head since early childhood.
- 7. If step six does not work, I will turn to the righteous, feminist dyke community, and ask for strength and power.
- 8. I make a list of all my personal losses, and ponder how I might be compensated for those damages.
- 9. I now make amends to myself as much as possible, grab me some me-time, and have some fucking fun at last.
- 10. I continue my personal inventory, and promptly



admit if I am starting to get bogged down in old, ingrained ways of thinking.

- 11. Through prayer and meditation, I seek to improve my conscious contact with my inner dyke – who I am sure is in there, someplace.
- 12. When I, as the result of these steps, have a spiritual awakening, I will try to carry this message to other heteroholics, and to practice these principles in our common endeavour to get on the right track.

Rapper Silvana Imam has taken Scandinavia by storm. Her determination to speak out against sexism, racism and homophobia has made her this year's most high-profile Swedish lesbian.

DIVA: Sweden loves you, Silvana.

SILVANA IMAM: I'm going to be completely honest: I'm really happy about it but it's about fucking time and I fucking deserve it. It's about time that someone says what I'm saying and it's not about me; it could be anybody as long as somebody is saying this. That's why my latest EP is called "När du ser mig se dig" (When You See Me, See Yourself), because if you love me then you love yourself, that's what it's about. It's about you.

You talk a lot about sexism, racism and homophobia and I think many feel that you speak directly to them.

I'm so glad you're saying that because that's what I intended. I want to make progressive music; I see myself as an artist, not a rapper. If you play random Swedish hip-hop then you know how to dance to that, but you play my song Imam Cobain and you're like, "What?" That's what I want and then you can love it or hate it.

There's a lot of talk about feminism in Sweden and female artists are largely celebrated; it's a very different picture in the UK. Why is this, do you think?

I can't really compare to the UK but yes, we have many strong women coming from Sweden. I think it's because we have a strong feminist movement here.

The word "feminist" used to be an insult, now it's like "why aren't you a feminist? It stands for equality" and that's much thanks to F! (Feministiskt Initiativ, a Swedish feminist party).

I'm not saying that Sweden is an entirely equal country, because that's not the case, but because feminism has become stronger in Sweden, the media has also jumped onto the bandwagon. That opens it up to more women but it's still very problematic, of course, to be seen as a female rapper. I don't want that, I'm a rapper, full stop.

What does feminism mean to you?

It's to be able to see the hidden structures. To not accept being seen through a male gaze, to understand what that means, that is feminism.

You speak about being lesbian in your lyrics, asking the listener to "sit on my face" - it's refreshing.

I rap about women because I'm a lesbian. I don't adapt to patriarchy, I don't give a shit about it.

On the other hand, you weren't this open

about your sexuality to begin with?

I didn't want to be introduced as "lesbian rapper Silvana Imam". Now that I'm established I want to talk about it and it's needed. Honestly, if I could have seen someone like me when I was 15... I would have died for that.

We see more and more gay girls in the public eye in Sweden. Is it a trend or a sign of real progress?

I do think media thinks it's a little exotic that you're not heterosexual but then you also have to think about who they choose to portray.

Also, if you compare femme lesbians and butch lesbians, no one questions my sexuality but femme lesbians get questioned all the time. They're not taken seriously, which is terrible but it's also very strange how some people speak to me like I'm a man. Like, "Eh, those fans out there, aren't you going to get it on with them?" Err, no.

"If you love me then you love yourself"

Who inspires you?

[Swedish artist] Beatrice Eli, my girlfriend. I fought for this woman for 16 months before she was mine! Oh god, I'm so in love with her I need to calm down, haha. She inspires me on so many levels, I don't even know where to start.

Are you a romantic?

Yeah but not like romantic meals, I shout her name at gigs and I play her song, Girls. I'm romantic like that.

Will you do a song together?

Insha'Allah; we'll see. She's my idol so I'd love that, of course.

Have you thought about rapping in English?

I did one song in English for a mixtape. I listened to it the other day and was like, "never again, it just doesn't feel right". I express myself best in Swedish. Although never say never.

What's next?

I'm going to release my next EP later this autumn and continue to be creative and change things up. I also want to come to London before the year is over.

I want to change the world, for real. I have been given a platform that I want to take care of. I want to create a change and the essence of it is that you should love yourself. •

Silvana's single, Tänd Alla Ljus, is out in November and her new EP, Jag Dör För Dig, will follow shortly. Catch her on tour in Sweden in November and December. silvanaimam.com





Lesbian Erotica Take Two

ARTIST SADIE LEE REIMAGINES EIGHTEENTH CENTURY ROCOCO ARTIST FRANÇOIS BOUCHER'S WORKS WITH A LESBIAN GAZE **WORDS** ANNA MCNAY

Just what do lesbians do in bed? According to classical paintings, they hover close together, arranged in aesthetically pleasing contortions, apparently enjoying blissful arousal by barely touching. Typically, they will be bedded in a pleasant pastoral land-scape or ancient marble Mediterranean palacio, with Cupid and his various cherubs hovering nearby.

In her new series of work, specially commissioned for the GFEST visual arts exhibition, Sadie Lee (born 1967) challenges and subverts this classical imagery, reimagining some of the 18th century Rococo artist François Boucher's works with both a lesbian gaze and female empathy.

Introducing a certain element of kink, and building on a personal interest in pornography, she rewrites this sterilised version of lesbian sex as an I Modi for the iPhone generation. Her use of vintage imagery from 1970s porn mags echoes the classical masters' borrowing of imagery from past works as well as their use of models, who were all but sex workers. By expressing her subjects' genuine pleasure, however, Lee introduces an important – and previously absent – element to her versions of these images: empathy with the model. As a lesbian artist, there is also a strong sense of desire.

Beautiful yet explicit, her works teeter on the oft-debated line between the erotic and pornographic.

Due to the explicit nature of these paintings and the fact that DIVA is also sold through supermarkets, our distributor has requested that explicit parts of these images are obscured.

GFEST Gaywise FESTival visual arts exhibition

Menier Gallery, 51 Southwark St, London SE1 1RU, 10-22 November gaywisefestival.org.uk/visual-arts
See Sadie Lee's artwork on Facebook: facebook.com/sadieleeart

A panel discussion on LGBT Myths and Mythology In Art – past, present and future –
featuring Sadie Lee, Anna McNay and others, will take place at
the Menier Gallery on 21 November at 6pm.
The event is free but tickets
must be booked through
the GFEST website.



Clockwise, from top left: After the Bath (oil on linen 76 x 61cm, 2014), After the Hunt (oil on linen 76 x 61cm, 2014), Jupiter in the Guise of Diana and Callisto (oil on linen 76 x 61cm, 2014), Iphis and Ianthe (oil on linen 76 x 61cm, 2014)

TAMPON RUN







GAMING EVE-DUTION

IN THE WORLD OF VIDEO GAMING, TO BE A WOMAN OR QUEER HAS ALL TOO OFTEN MEANT BEING CONSIGNED TO THE DIGITAL SIDELINES. NOW KAITE WELSH FINDS THAT CHANGE IS AFOOT

ideo games aren't traditionally known for their womenfriendly content. The sexualisation of Grand Theft Auto, a misogynist gaming community and the kind of sexist "banter" you'd normally find in lads' mags has put women off and for good reason.

Games developers are finally catching on to the fact that not everyone who logs several hours of World of Warcraft a night is a straight teenage boy. In the US, gamers are more likely to be adult women than teenage boys and games are starting to reflect that.

Once, women were relegated to NPCs – non-playing characters who were only there to provide decoration. Now they're taking the lead.

2013's breakout hit was Gone Home, an interactive narrative that told the story of sisters Kaitlin and Samantha. Set in 1995, it's like someone turned My So-Called Life or All Over Me into a video game, complete with riot grrrl references and teenage lesbians. It's not just a fantastic video game, it's the queer indie mystery story we've all been waiting for.

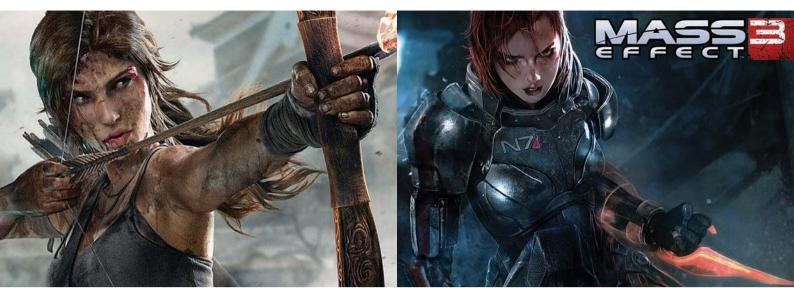
But if traditional gaming is more your cup of tea, female gamers are no longer limited to playing men or over-sexualised women. Portal won feminist fans after the game revealed part-way through that the

character gamers were playing was actually female. The sequel continued the trend – the game is seen entirely through the eyes of Chell, which means that there's no opportunity for players to fetishise her. Women are becoming the subjects of video games, not their objects.

With the rise of "gaymers", as queer gamers are often called, there's been an increase in same-sex relationships, from the female couple in Mass Effect to Dragon Age 2, which completely removes any assumption of sexuality from its characters and puts their romantic choices entirely in the hands of the players.

One of the newest games to set feminist gamers' pulses racing is Alien: Isolation. Based on the Ridley Scott franchise that gave us Sigourney Weaver with a buzz cut, it's played from the perspective of Ripley's daughter Amanda, who is every bit as kick ass as her mother. It's also





one of the scariest games out there, but like the original Alien film, it's the suspense that's terrifying rather than the blood and guts of video games of yore. Even if you're more of a film buff than a game geek, this is by far the best sequel to Alien - and refreshingly puts the focus back on a lead female character unlike the last film in the franchise, Alien vs Predator.

With riot grrrl references and teenage lesbians, Gone Home is a fantastic video game and queer indie mystery

Even Lara Croft, the beloved but problematic grande dame of gaming, is back in a new interpretation from Rhianna Pratchett - daughter of Terry and one of the gaming world's most exciting new talents. Pratchett received some flak for raising the spectre of sexual violence in a medium where that's all too often played for thrills in-game and as a threat to female gamers from their sexist counterparts. Pratchett re-booted the original Lara Croft universe and focused on Lara's characterisation rather than her appearance - a trend she's set to continue in next year's Rise of the Tomb Raider.

But just because the games are moving on, doesn't mean that the gaming community is. Although women are creating more female- and queer-friendly online spaces, any criticism of the misogyny that still pervades the gaming sphere is met with the same sadly predictable sexist trolling that happens whenever a woman dares to have an opinion online. Anita Sarkeesian, the woman behind hugely popular crowdfunded YouTube series Tropes vs Women In Video Games, has received death threats, rape threats and had her home address posted online by men eager to shut her up. This has been going on for two years and has sparked a nauseating backlash called GamerGate, where male gamers claim that it's Sarkeesian that's the problem.

Luckily, the media outrage is firmly on her side, which bodes well for encouraging more women to enter the profession. Some of the best video game coverage in the mainstream UK media in recent years has been from women - Naomi Alderman in the Guardian and Helen Lewis in the New Statesman are particularly stellar examples.

Alderman herself writes video games, and if you're more of the outdoors type, Alderman has scripted two "seasons" of a game to get even the laziest couch potato into her running shoes. Zombies, Run! And

Zombies, Run! 2 straddle the line between game, podcast and fitness app - through your headphones, you're immersed in a world ravaged by the zombie apocalypse and the only way to stay alive is to run like hell. If you're a bookworm and a zombie fan, it's an excellent accompaniment to Mira Grant's brilliant Newsflesh trilogy. The only problem is that it's almost too realistic – there are points when you're so immersed in the narrative that you forget you're just running down a canal path in pre-apocalypse London.

The next generation of female gamers are already starting to show us what they're made of. Andrea Gonzales and Sophie Houser might still be high school students, but they've created an online game that's as addictive as it is awesome. Tampon Run is an 8-bit game - AKA looks like something you'd have played in the early 90s - with a simple premise. You're on your period and heading out to pick up some supplies and you have to blast your enemies with tampons instead of bullets before you can pick up your next box of heavy flow Always. It's as simple as that, meaning you can play if you've never picked up a joystick, or if you want to vent your frustrations on the sexist trolls in your raiding party.

The old guard of the gaming world might be fighting back, but they're running out of ammunition while feminist gamers are levelling up for an epic win. •

What are you playing? Tweet @DIVAmagazine



THE FIRST LADIES **OF SPOKEN WORD**

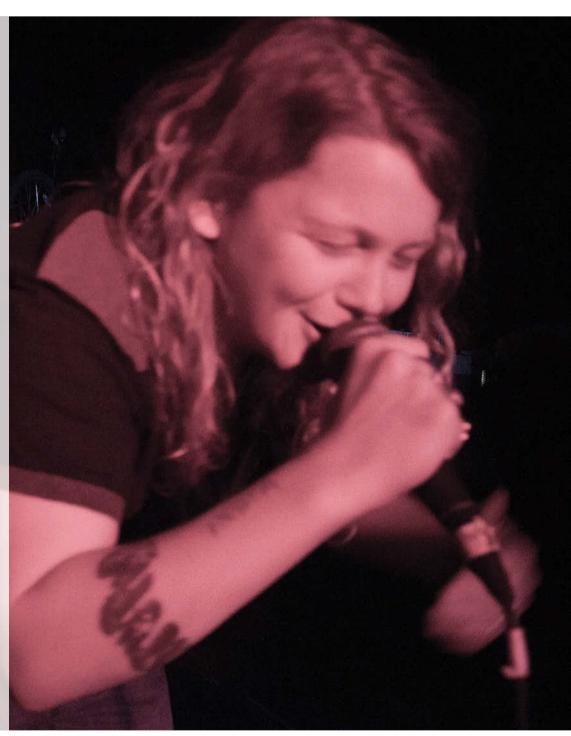


DIVA CELEBRATES FOUR YOUNG QUEER WOMEN, SPITTING WORDS LIKE BUTTERFLIES THAT STING LIKE BEES WORDS CARRIE LYELL, JANE CZYZSELSKA

KATE TEMPEST

Shortlisted for this year's Mercury prize with hip-hop album Everybody Down, poet and spoken-word artist Kate Tempest is one of the music and literary world's brightest stars. Like many performance poets she came across the slam scene by accident when she was 15 hanging out with mates in squats and chicken shops. Writing rap lyrics friends described as poetry, it wasn't long before she developed a following, filling festival tents wherever she performed her epic, honest and humane tales of life, loss, love, longing and lies. Then, in 2013, aged 26, Tempest won the Ted Hughes prize for innovation in poetry. She was the youngest person ever to win the award. Since then the number of invitations to write plays, more poetry, gig with her band, Sound of Rum, and tour with poetry grandees such as Benjamin Zephaniah and John Cooper Clarke has grown, like sprouting thickets of teenage body hair. Interviewed about being included in the Poetry Book Society's 20 Next Generation Poets, she says: "I think it's important all poetry is spoken, not necessarily to an audience but if you don't speak the words out loud you won't understand the poem in the way that you could be understanding it if you heard it. This is a higher state we are aspiring to, otherwise it would be prose, but you should read it aloud to yourself; when you speak the words: that's the journey." (JC)

katetempest.co.uk



Described as a modern day Virginia Woolf, Sophia Blackwell is a writer who loves vintage dresses, Twitter and cake. She was inspired to dip her toes into performance poetry 10 years ago after attending a spoken word night. "It was one of the most powerful, visceral things I'd seen," she says. "I was so nervous at my first performance that I thought my head was going to fall off."

Exceptionally talented, Blackwell has more than one string to her bow. As well as performing, she is the author of one collection of poetry, two short stories and a novel, and also teaches writing workshops for children and adults. But despite the writing process for each medium being completely different, Blackwell switches between them with ease.

When writing spoken word, she says she starts with the hook lines, scribbling them on bus tickets or receipts, and builds out from there. "These random lines come to me first as if they're demanding my attention and won't let me go," she says. "They have a kind of magic."

That magic radiates from her performances, which are captivating, moving and often hilarious, too – search YouTube for "Sophia Blackwell Teen Angst" if you need convincing of that fact. "If my performances entertain people and help them feel less isolated, that's what I came to do," she says. "And it's a joy to do it."

What advice does she have for would-be poets? "The same advice I'd give anyone trying to make it in anything; do what resonates with you." (CL)

sophiablackwell.com



| FEATURE | SPOKEN WORD |

LISA LUXX

Perhaps it was when she was at school, when kids would stop her and ask her for a "rap". Perhaps it was the drip, drip of rhymes by rap idol Eminem that gave performance poet Lisa Luxx something to keep her out of trouble, something to focus her energy on, allowing her to express herself on her own terms. Luxx, who describes herself back then as "a wayward kid" reckons so but as she tells DIVA, that formula has never changed; she still writes alone.

Luxx came out through poetry and, as any lesbian knows, coming out isn't a one-time job. "I come out again every time I perform," she tells me wryly. A collection of her work called Down The Rabbit Hole, published in

2012, features an entire chapter dedicated to the lesbian-coming-of-age. "Being a lesbian plays a huge part in how the world reacts to me and how I in turn react to the world, so, much of the work you see me performing now references life as a lesbian in a hetero-male-dominated culture."

One of my favourites of hers is The Ghost of My Future Self, in which Luxx tells a story about meeting an older woman in a bar. In this work the full range of her talent collide. Her rhythm, her keen observations and powerful delivery duck and weave like a poet in boxing gloves. "It helps that I don't write in a standard poetic form; the beats and rhyming patterns are all based on the rhythm of my own naturally idiosyncratic voice," she explains.

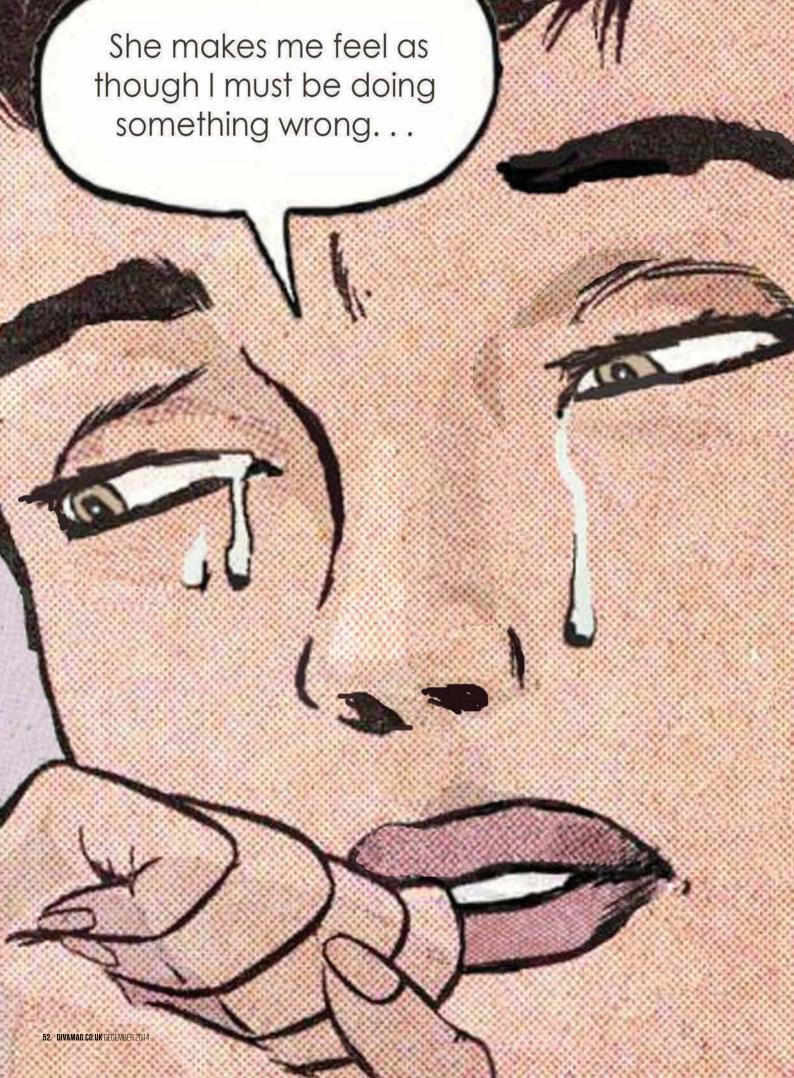
Performing everywhere from an unofficial spoken word takeover of a London bus to a street corner in San Francisco, her fan base includes radical theatre-makers, dyke gardeners, acid-head musicians, feminist cunt-power painters, Suki Waterhouse and, er, women she's sleeping with.

No snoozer, Luxx has just finished writing a spoken word film which is now in production. The work takes her in a new direction and is influenced by a "psychedelic, spiritual, sexual and political awakening". Somewhat mysteriously, she announces this next project is going to require her to disappear for a while before releasing it. Keep an eye on her website next spring. (JC)

lisaluxx.com







HOW TO TELL IF YOU'RE IN AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

(AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT IF YOU ARE)

LGBT PEOPLE ARE JUST AS LIKELY AS HETEROSEXUALS TO EXPERIENCE PARTNER ABUSE WORDS JANE CZYZSELSKA

I'll never forget the rage I felt when an ex of mine told me she'd been been raped by a former girlfriend. My anger was ratcheted up a few more notches when she added that her partner had shrugged it off when confronted, chiding her for "over-reacting". As she told me what had happened, tears streaming down her face, she told me why it had taken her a good few years before she felt strong enough to leave her. Firstly, despite her girlfriend's behaviour, she and her ex had a child together and working as she did as a low-paid carer, she wasn't initially financially secure enough to leave her. Secondly, as her ex succeeded in isolating her from her friends and family and threatened to kill herself if she told anyone about their relationship, she had started to doubt herself. She had never heard of a woman raping another woman. Would anyone believe her?

Let's get one thing straight: if you think you've been raped, you probably have. And the manipulative behaviours exhibited above are common among perpetrators, who will often chip away at their victim's self-confidence, making them even more vulnerable and easier to control. And even though women are statistically less likely to rape than men, we are still just as capable of being perpetrators, as Stonewall reports. Increasing research demonstrates that partner abuse - whether sexual or otherwise - is as common and as severe among same-sex couples as among heterosexual couples. There is, however, a general lack of recognition that same-sex domestic violence can occur. For example, same-sex domestic violence is rarely acknowledged in the LGBT community, or by social policy makers, lawyers,

or health-care practitioners. This lack of visibility makes it difficult for LGBT people to report incidents of domestic violence or take advantage of structures that exist to protect people from it. Those who want to assist LGBT people also struggle to find resources to help them do so, though it is encouraging that same-sex domestic violence has been recognised in law since 2003.

LGB people are less likely to tell their doctor or nurse that they are experiencing domestic violence if they do not feel able to disclose their sexual orientation to them. They might also be reluctant to demonstrate a problem within a relationship, especially if they think that the health-care practitioner thinks gay relationships are generally unstable or unsustainable. LGBT people may not want to perpetuate that view by admitting domestic violence. There is still confusion about what constitutes domestic abuse but whether you are lesbian or bisexual, the tell-tale signs are all too common. Broken Rainbow and Galop, two London LGBT anti-violence and abuse charities have created guides to help women who think they may be in an abusive relationship and what to do if they are.

I DON'T GET HIT. HOW CAN IT BE DOMESTIC ABUSE?

Domestic abuse is not always physical, and that means that the signs may not be obvious. It can take many forms including psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional abuse. Abuse can involve controlling a person's contact with their friends and family, progressively isolating them. It can involve destroying property, verbal threats in private or

public, calling you names, threatening to "out" you, or using put-downs. An abusive partner or ex-partner may also use your gender or sexuality as a basis for threats or harm, they may threaten to harm you or others you love, control your access to money, make unwanted advances or force you into unwanted sexual contact. If their demands aren't met they can sometimes threaten to harm themselves if you leave or seek help.

DOES LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER DOMESTIC ABUSE EXIST?

Broken Rainbow's national LGBT Domestic Violence Helpline took more than 3,000 calls in 2013. They spoke to callers experiencing LGBT domestic violence, signposting, listening and talking through issues. Surveys show that at least one in four LGBT people experience domestic violence. LGBT domestic violence exists. It is real.

WHEN TWO WOMEN FIGHT ISN'T IT JUST A LOVERS' TIFF?

There is nothing trivial about violence in a relationship and referring to it this way minimises the impact it has and is one reason why LGBT domestic violence remains a hidden issue.

WHEN TWO WOMEN FIGHT ABOUT SEX ISN'T IT JUST SEX GAMES, LIKE S/M?

S/M (sadomasochism) is a consensual sexual practice. Domestic violence is abusive and one-sided and features no such consent. Sexual role-play is not the same as domestic violence.













DOES IT HAPPEN TO YOU?

CONFIDENTIAL ADVICE AND SUPPORT FOR LESBIANS. GAY MEN, BISEXUAL AND TRANS (LGBT) PEOPLE AFFECTED BY DOMESTIC ABUSE IN LONDON

WWW.LGBTDAP.ORG.UK

HOW IS LGBT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DIFFERENT FROM HETEROSEXUAL **DOMESTIC ABUSE?**

One main point is the lack of support services available to LGBT domestic abuse sufferers. Another is having to out yourself to report the domestic violence. Added to that, the services needed to support us often create problems by classing domestic violence as common assault, or mistaking/not being able to identify the primary perpetrator. This all means LGBT people have added problems when trying to get help.

HOW CAN IT BE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IF THE SMALLER PERSON HITS THE BIGGER ONE?

Size and stature is not reflected in one's abusive behaviour. Just because someone is smaller does not mean they cannot hit you, destroy your possessions, threaten to out you to your friends and family, control your finances or belittle you in front of others.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

If you are experiencing domestic violence or abuse, devising a safety plan will allow you to think about how you can improve your safety if and when further violence or abuse occurs. It won't guarantee your safety, but could help improve it. Your personal safety plan may include some of the following:

CALL AN LGBT HELPLINE

LGBT people inherently know the issues and problems another LGBT person will face. Callers to Galop or Broken Rainbow will not be judged for their sexuality; staff and volunteers can engage with those experiencing

GETTING HELP

If you are in an abusive relationship or worried about someone who is, these organisations can help

GALOP

galop.org.uk 020 7704 2040

BROKEN RAINBOW (Service available nationwide) brokenrainbow.org.uk 0300 999 5428 (LGBT) help@brokenrainbow.org.uk

LONDON LESBIAN AND GAY SWITCHBOARD

llgs.org.uk 0300 330 0630

PACE

pacehealth.org.uk 020 7700 1323

STONEWALL HOUSING

stonewallhousing.org 020 7359 5767

RAPE CRISIS LONDON

rapecrisislondon.org 0808 802 9999

Jane Czyzselska is a registered qualified counsellor and can be contacted in confidence at czyzselska@gmail.com and shoreditchtherapy.com. domestic violence and those perpetrating it.

- If you or your family are in immediate danger, call the police on 999.
- Tell someone you can trust what is happening, and think about setting up a password with either a friend, neighbour or family member that you can use to explain there is an emergency and you need help quickly.
- Prepare a bag of clothes, medication and other essentials for yourself and children, eg copies of driving licence, birth certificates, passports, benefit books or letters, important numbers, etc. Hide the bag somewhere safe.
- If you have a car, make an extra set of keys and hide them where you can get to them if you need to.
- Teach your children to call 999 in an emergency and what they would need to say (for example, their full name, address and telephone number).
- Try to keep a small amount of money and your credit/debit cards on you at all times - including change for the phone and for bus fares.

- If you think your partner is about to attack you, try to get to a safer place, such as rooms that have a way out and access to a telephone. Try to avoid rooms that have potential weapons in them, such as the kitchen or garage, and rooms like the bathroom where it is easier for them to trap you.
- Keep any abusive letters, emails and text messages as evidence of abuse.
- If your partner injures you, go to a doctor or hospital for treatment so there is a record of the abuse.
- If you are planning to leave your partner, think about how you can do this as safely as possible. Sometimes this can be the most dangerous time for you. If your partner knows you are planning to leave, they may become more violent and abusive.
- Plan to leave at a time you know your partner will not be around, and if you have legal custody of children, take them with you as there may be further complications if you don't.
- If you need help with any of the above, call any of the organisations in the side box, below. **O**

WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?

An expert view on LGBT domestic abuse

Domestic violence and abuse can happen in LGB relationships and/or where a partner is trans in these relationships. In their research, Profs Catherine Donovan (University of Sunderland) and Marianne Hester (University of Bristol) argue that there exists a "public story" about domestic violence and abuse that describes the problem as being one of heterosexual men for heterosexual women, of it being a problem of physical violence and embodied gender – the bigger, "stronger" man being physically violent towards a smaller, "weaker" woman. Whilst this might describe a very common experience of domestic violence and abuse it leaves out the experiences of those who are not heterosexual, those where the experiences are not always or only physical violence/abuse and those where the presentation of gender does not map easily onto a "male/female" binary. Domestic violence and abuse is about power and control, where one partner uses any means possible – physical, emotional, sexual, financial – to exert power and control over another partner and to punish a partner for not obeying what Donovan and Hester call "the relationship rules": that the relationship is for the abusive partner and on their terms; and that the survivor is responsible for looking after the abusive partner and the relationship. They also argue that love is implicated in domestically violent and abusive relationships because love and relationships often reflect heterosexual norms: one person "in charge", with designated roles for each within the relationship that are based on

potential inequalities between them. In abusive relationships the roles support the relationship rules and the language of love is also often used making it difficult for a survivor to realise and name what is happening to them as domestic violence and abuse. For example, abusive partners often reveal need or neediness to explain why they are being violent/ abusive: they have had personal/historical struggles with abuse, substance use; they are never understood by their boss, their family, their neighbours; they are unique individuals who require "special treatment" by the survivor – and so on. Survivors can feel they are responsible for looking after the abusive partner because they are the only one who understands them and because there are feelings of love and care, or declarations of love from the abusive partner ("you know you're the only one", "you know I didn't mean it" etc) that confuse their understanding of what's going on. Sometimes, survivors believe they are the stronger partner, holding the abusive partner and the relationship together. Other times, an abusive partner can convince a survivor that what happens in their relationship is "normal" for LGB and/or T people, to be expected and accepted. This can happen when the survivor is in their first relationship and/or when they are isolated from any LGB and/or T community/network/friendships.

To order Domestic Violence and Sexuality: What's Love Got To Do With It? by Catherine Donovan and Marianne Hester go to tinyurl.com/DIVACDMH



Tough Cyc

CARRIE LYELL WENT TO ALBERT SQUARE TO
SPEAK TO LUISA BRADSHAW-WHITE AND
SPEAK TO LUISA BRADSHAW-WHITE AND
REBECCA SCROGGS ABOUT THEIR CHARACTERS IN
REBECCA SCROGGS ABOUT THEIR ON ON TV, AND
EASTENDERS, LESBIAN REPRESENTATION ON TV, AND
THEIR ONGOING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE STORYLINE
THEIR ONGOING



astEnders has been the first soap with a normal couple who are both girls"

istorically, soap writers are a bit rubbish at lesbians. In 30 years of EastEnders, we've had a smattering of one-dimensional offerings with no handle on reality, and the other soaps haven't faired much better. So we were pleasantly surprised to find a lot more to Tina and Tosh, Walford's newest resident lesbians, than tokenistic offerings without a shred of personality. And alongside a handful of other gay and bisexual characters in E20, Albert Square is slowly becoming queerer than ever.

Played by TV veteran Luisa Bradshaw-White and newbie Rebecca Scroggs, Tina and Tosh are part of on-going plans to make East-Enders better reflect the diversity of modern London and revitalise the long-running BBC soap. Luisa, 39, had previously said she never wanted to do EastEnders, but when executive producer Dominic Treadwell-Collins asked her to play the part of Shirley Carter's brash, naughty and loveable sister Tina, she cast her doubts to one side, and a year on from her first appearance in Walford, she's glad she changed her mind.

"People mock soaps," she says. "They say, 'Oh, the acting's not that great', or, 'It's easy', but it's the most challenging job I've done and the most fulfilling job I've done." In that whirlwind year, her character has become a fan favourite, injecting much-needed levity into the show. But there's more to Tina Carter than laughs and loud outfits, and the next few months promise drama and heartache for her and her girlfriend Fiona "Tosh" Mackintosh, played by Rebecca, as the violence in their relationship escalates, reaching its dramatic climax at Christmas in typical Walford style.

Unlike Luisa - who's had plenty of experience on TV with parts in Grange Hill, This Life, Bad Girls and Holby City - for 32-year-old Rebecca Scroggs, EastEnders' Tosh is her first TV role. Did she find it daunting joining such an established show? "Oh, definitely daunting. It's always going to be, walking into a show like this. But I have to say my opening episodes were just brilliant. I was in at the deep end in a good way, straight in with Luisa. We didn't actually exchange any lines for about three scenes because we just kissed." Was that difficult? "No, it wasn't hard," says Rebecca, "I had no qualms about it." Luisa nods. "That was probably the easiest thing, wasn't it?" "Yeah, breaking the ice, as it were. Looking back, I could have put some more oomph into it but obviously I'd just met her," laughs Rebecca. "I couldn't stick my tongue down her throat. That's not really the done thing!"

Despite having been on the Square for a relatively short space of time, both Luisa and Rebecca say they already feel like part of the family and their partnership has gone from strength to strength. What's the best thing about being on one of the most popular programmes in the UK? "I only live half an hour down the road..." laughs Luisa. "No, no. My main thing is that the storylines move along so quickly. It's almost like doing theatre, you've just got to learn your stuff and go out and do it. You don't really get a chance to make a mistake. Some days you're not overly satisfied, other days you're like, yes, mastered that. But the scripts keep coming, new storylines keep coming, and I find as an actor I don't feel bored." Rebecca, who studied at RADA and worked in theatre before joining EastEnders in February, agrees. "It flexes your muscles in a way that is so brilliant. As Luisa said, there is a snobbery about soap acting which I find completely bizarre - now that I'm inside it - because it's one of the hardest things you can do. To stay in the moment, stay focused, and commit to each script as they're coming in. You're doing four at a time, eight at a time, 12. It's amazing. The best thing about being part of this huge show is its continuity. It goes back in my history, it goes back in the history of London. Seeing actors you've grown up with, it's just wonderful."

Originally conceived as "an overweight 50-year-old who was past it", the character of Tina was completely rewritten when Luisa was brought in by an EastEnders casting director as a "wildcard". "We created something from nothing," says Luisa. "Dom wanted to bring a lesbian into the show and he said, 'I'd really love you to do it'. He didn't have to convince me much. I knew what he wanted and I knew I could do it. I felt quite passionate about what he wanted." What Dominic Treadwell-Collins wanted was a character with a well-developed personality who also just happened to be gay.

was in at the deep end with Luisa. We didn't actually exchange any lines for about three scenes because we just kissed"

"It's always an 'issue', isn't it?" says Rebecca. "It's always a problem in someone's life." But Tina and Tosh are out, proud and confident, and Luisa says they are just like any other couple on the Square. "I loved the way I came into the show. Dom and I were both really sure of the fact that when I came in. I wanted to have a personality, for her to be all these different things, and gay. Not just come in with the storyline 'I'm gay' because it's just boring now. We've moved on from there and I think EastEnders has been the first soap that has a normal couple who are both girls."

It's obviously paid off, with Tina and Tosh the talk of many a Tumblr. And Luisa and Rebecca have been cooking up hilarious ways to acknowledge the support of the fans. "We thought it'd be funny if Tina and Tosh were huge L Word fans," Luisa laughs. "We asked for a white board so we could do a replica of Alice's chart. We hope the gay viewers get it and don't think we're sad!" The girls, who say they're massive fans of the Showtime series, managed to sneak another reference into the show when Tina calls Tosh "Mamma T" at the fertility clinic, paying homage to Bette and Tina. "Did you get that in?" laughs Rebecca. "Yeah, they kept it in! I was really giggling, but it was subtle," says Luisa.

Tina and Tosh are indeed a step in the right direction, but why has it taken so long to get lesbian characters right? Rebecca thinks it's because there isn't enough female representation in cultural media generally. "It's a feminist issue, isn't it? That's why Tosh is, for all her faults, a very positive force in the show, because she's feminist. She's not a political person but she's in a man's world being a

firefighter and she has a sort of autonomy about her.

"People on the street often say to me: 'Are you the man? Are you the butch one?' I don't think it's really like that. Sure, Tosh's got characteristics we associate, unfortunately, with being male, like having a strong personality and doing a job that's physical, but she's still a woman. I don't see why those qualities are owned by men." Rebecca also thinks it has something to do with who is putting pen to paper. "There's a lack of representation for women writers," she says. "Not that men can't write female gay characters, but if you're commissioning people from a certain background,

Luisa, who recently spoke publicly for the first time about being gay, says while she doesn't think her sexuality brings a sense of authenticity to the character, she felt passionately about Treadwell-Collins' vision for Tina and knew she was the right person for the job. "I thought, if anyone's going to do it then I bloody well am." Did she make a conscious decision to come out after playing Tina? "I've never been 'in'," she says. "I literally just mentioned my girlfriend in a magazine, that's all I did. For me, it felt very important to not 'come out' because straight people don't need to 'come in', do they? Is it interesting, even? Making a big sort of statement? It's important to just do what you feel comfortable with and live your own life. Do your own bloody thing. I certainly had no plans to be any sort of gay spokesperson," she smiles.

Domestic violence has been covered many times on EastEnders and other soaps, and this has done an awful lot to get people talking and change public perception of the issue. Erin Pizzey, who started one of the first women's refuges, said that EastEnders had done more to raise the issue of violence against women in one story (Little Mo and Trevor) than she had done in 25 years. But what makes this storyline different from ones in the past, like Little Mo and Trevor? Rebecca says: "We've moved on in the discourse, and there's a lot of work being done with charities to talk about domestic violence. There's this idea that there's an evil man who wants to abuse a woman just because he's bad. I'm sure that does happen but it's often much more muddy and difficult and strange. You've got to unpick the complexity of the relationship."

Luisa agrees. "Little Mo was such a 'victim'. It's interesting that Tina's not, and it's not as one-sided." While no doubt upsetting, they hope that Tina and Tosh's harrowing storyline, which was developed in consultation with the same-sex domestic violence charity Broken Rainbow, will bring some positives and get people talking about the issue. "When East-Enders is at its best, it changes the world a little bit," says Treadwell-Collins. "EastEnders isn't about propaganda, but it is about life, which makes it a very powerful show. And you have to use that weapon carefully. You can't be glib with what you do."

Treadwell-Collins' success in turning around EastEnders' fortunes has largely been down to subverting our expectations. It would have been predictable to cast Tosh as a classic villain, but what we're seeing is something much more nuanced and complicated. Rebecca says: "EastEnders has set Tosh up as being someone not to judge too quickly. She's not a panto-



or me, it felt very important to not 'come out' because straight people don't need to 'come in', do they?"

mime villain. She's complex. She has had to fight so hard in her life. She's mixed race. She's a lesbian. She works in a man's world. She's been alienated from her family. Tina's been lucky - the Carters are so accepting of her. My family haven't been accepting at all. I don't know how much Tosh likes being a lesbian, actually, because she's quite a conventional person. She wants a white picket fence and a baby. There are things about her you can really like," she adds. "And if you allow yourself, you can actually almost root for her. I can't justify Tosh's behaviour – I'd never defend her – but it comes from somewhere. It comes from a deep frustration in her about their relationship, a frustration with what she feels is Tina's lack of commitment. A paranoia. But it's not justified that she ever, ever hits her."

Is it difficult to play those scenes? "It's always really hard," she says. "You try and stay in the moment and yet you're like, 'grab there, pull there'." Luisa adds: "Every time we've done stunts I've ended up black and blue. She's like, 'I don't want to hurt you' but I'd rather it looked realistic. The last one we did was really, really good. In fact, we left the set shaking and both wanted to cry." "I do enjoy playing those scenes, I have to say," Rebecca says. "Not because I'm a violent psychopath, but because they are so intensely emotional and psychological and really difficult but great. It's when I really understand the character the most, sadly. She is so much driven by this anger and this pain that I really enjoy playing her because it feels like that's the truth of her, really."

While same-sex domestic violence is no

doubt an important issue, there will be many viewers disappointed that soap writers have once again failed to show lesbian relationships in a positive light. Does this storyline play into those tropes about lesbians being, more often than not, bad, mad or dangerous to know? "No, definitely not," says Luisa. "I'm hoping that this is different. Tina and Tosh actually do have good times together, and I think there's so much more to it than the domestic violence. There's a proper relationship that they've managed to get together. But you've got to have drama."

Drama and gritty storylines have been EastEnders' raison d'être since it began in 1985, and despite Treadwell-Collins shaking things up in other areas, there are no signs of giving up on a formula that has brought incredible success and countless awards. Regardless of sexuality, no one in E20 is allowed to be happy for long. "No, no. And that would be boring, as an actor as well," says Luisa. But will Tina and Tosh get a happily ever after? Rebecca says: "I don't want the domestic violence to continue because I'd like Tosh to heal a bit, but at the same time I think the writing has been amazing. It's nice to be challenged as a actor. But you know what? I hope they do get through it because when it's good, it's great."

Are you in an abusive relationship? See feature, p54

Want more from the EastEnders girls? Digital readers can find out about Rebecca's TV addiction and Luisa's celebrity crush in our exclusive behind the scenes video.

PHOTOS LEZLI+ROSE

HAIR + MAKE-UP **CLAIRE RAY @ CAROL HAYES**STYLING + PHOTOGRAPHY ASSISTANT **PRIYESH**

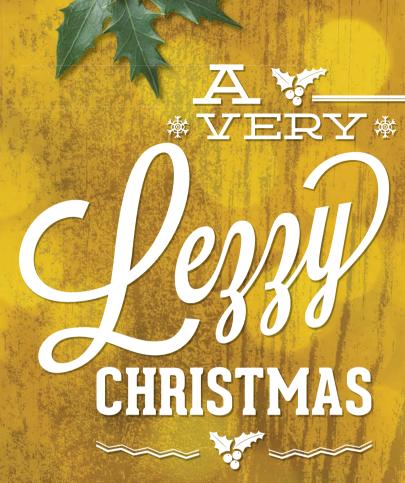








LITTLE SOAP COMPANY



IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR GORGEOUS GIFTS FOR YOUR LOVED ONES, WHY NOT BUY FROM THESE COMPANIES, OWNED AND RUN BY LESBIAN AND BI WOMEN?

POODLES & POMPADOURS



Poodles and Pompadours is a retro pet boutique and grooming parlour created by Haley, a doglover who saw a gap in the market for glamorous pet apparel. Smarten up Fido with a doggie bow tie (£10.99) or vintage-print bandana priced (£12.99).





GOODORDERING BIKE BAGS

Goodordering is an east London-based bicycle bag company which was started by owner and designer Jacqui Mai. The range of bags, priced at around £32 for a Handlebar Bag and £60 for a Backpack, make the perfect gift for a cycling enthusiast or style-conscious commuter.

goodordering.com





Created by 23-yearold Alexandra, VOLO Underwear is a brand designed with lesbians in mind. Although the range is still in the early stages of development, VOLO's First Edition underwear is stylish, comfortable and sure to be a popular gift (£8 +

> postage). volounderwear.com



SH! TOYS

Sh! has been the go-to for its wide range of reliable sex toys for almost 20 years and

offers something for everyone, including these cute, well-priced vibes (from £12) which make ideal stocking-fillers.

sh-womenstore.com

FOOD ★

MAD HATTERS

Created by experienced chocolatier Lucy Armstrong, who recently won her third Great Taste Award, this gourmet chocolate hamper would make a great luxury gift for those among us who demolish their advent calendar 24 days before Christmas. Be sure to check out the Santa Box, which is made entirely of chocolate - so you can eat the chocolates inside and then the box too! Small gift selections start from £5.

GOURMET CHOCOLATES



SIGN UP TO OUR DIVA SUBSCRIBER EMAIL NEWSLETTER

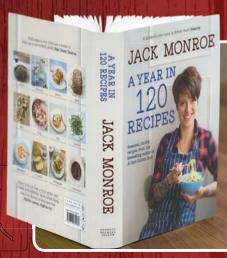
and you could win a luxury gourmet chocolate hamper containing a box of 24 chocolates, 2 hot chocolate stirrers, a bag of award-winning fudge, a bag of chocolate-covered honeycomb, a bag of orange crisp, a bar of chocolate, a bag of marshmallows and 2 Christmas Iollipops. Two runners-up will also receive smaller prizes. To be in with a chance of winning, make sure you've signed up to our email newsletter by emailing your full name to putting Newsletter in the email subject. Competition closes on 18 December, Winners will be chosen at random

BUTCH JAM

Artisan maker of seasonal jams and chutneys Emma grows her own fruit and is proud to use British producers for everything else. To celebrate the launch of a children's book called Jampires, Emma created a bespoke raspberry and vanilla jam with real silver sparkles! A great gift for foodies, prices start at £3.50 a jar (+ postage from £3.50).



Chester-based Mad Hatters Tearoom and Bakery has featured on ITV's Britain's Best Bakery and on the Channel 4 series Heston's Great British Food, showcasing beautiful cakes and handmade treats. They also offer courses - such as retro sweetmaking and Alice In Wonderland cupcake decorating. Classes are priced from £45. Curiouser and curiouser? Check out the website.



DIVA cover girl Jack's back with a second cook-book stuffed with inspiring recipes for delicious, thrifty, seasonal grub. The perfect gift for people who love to eat, whatever their budget.







FREE RANGE FRAMES



Free Range Frames offers a selection of unique handmade wooden frames. Owner Katherine is happy to work on commissioned pieces to complement a particular photograph, print or style (prices range from £30-£350).

freeranaeframes.co.uk



Gay-friendly and with years of experience, Phocus Portraits offers a range of photography services which include family shoots and portrait parties. How about surprising a loved one with a glamorous shoot in the vintage photo booth?

nhacuspartraits con







HOORAY4CLAY



Jude at
Hooray4Clay
makes lovely handmade ceramic
gifts, souvenirs
and sculptures
such as traditional
lucky horseshoes,
hearts and Welsh
love spoons (£8),
which can also be
personalised.

facebook.com, Hooray4Clay

PHATGRRL JEWELLERY

Phatgrrl produces eye-catching, alternative, handmade jewellery.
There are lots of quirky and original pieces to choose from – check out the Chocolate Bar cufflinks (£18), Ice Cream Banana Sundae necklace (£32), Bronze Filigree Bird earrings (£20, all + postage).

Phatgrrl.com





CURIOUS MINDS VINTAGE

Based in Buckingham, Curious Minds Vintage offers everything vintage – from clothes to games, cameras to guitars, chinaware to trinkets, theres's something for everyone at this local treasure trove.







You know Laura
Prepon plays poker,
right? These awesome feminist
playing cards were created by
Homoground, a resource dedicated
to promoting equality and visibility for
all people through art and music. The
quirky cards feature 56 illustrations
of feminist musicians, designed by 14
feminist artists (priced at around £25,
including delivery from the US).
feministcards.com





SLAM SISTER DESIGNS

Slam Sister Designs produces lesbian greeting cards for every occasion. Their full-colour, A4 calendar (£6.99 + postage) makes a great gift! slamsisterdesigns.com



L-Calendar is a beautiful black and white calendar featuring images of real lesbian couples (priced at €28, about £23, including postage).

en.cristinadelamadera.com





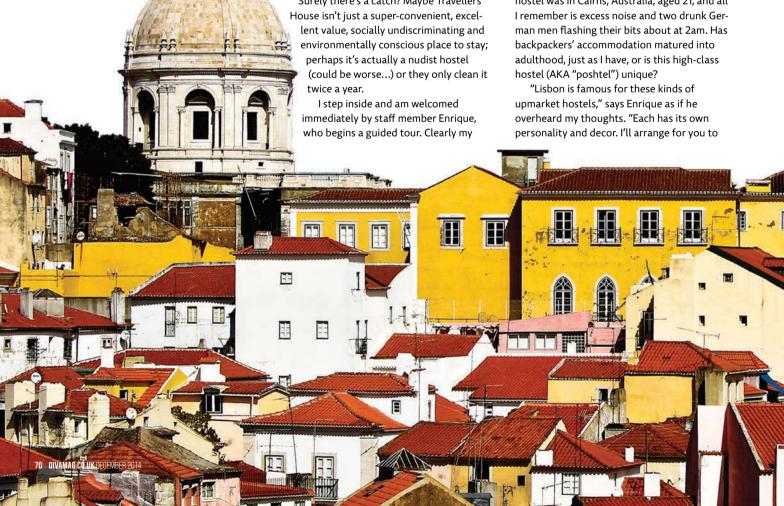
POSH LISBON ON A BUDGET!

LUCY FRY FINDS CHEAP ACCOMMODATION IN THE PORTUGUESE CAPITAL, WHERE THE HOSTELS ARE FAR FROM HOSTILE...

I knock hesitantly on the hostel door. Surely there's been a mistake; I knew Travellers House was "centrally situated" but this is amazing, slap bang in the middle of all the action on one of Lisbon's most iconic strips, the pedestrianised Rua Augusta. Ahead of me is a grand archway that leads out into a vast square facing the Tagus River. Five minutes' stroll in one direction and I'll find some of the Portuguese capital's funkiest shops and 10 minutes in the other and I'll arrive at the bottom of a windy road leading up to the Moorish Sao Jorge Castle. And all starting at €16 for a dorm or €60 for an en-suite double.

Surely there's a catch? Maybe Travellers perhaps it's actually a nudist hostel

cynicism will find no fodder here. Not only is it all spic and span but Travellers House is full of friendly (and fully-clothed) international visitors who take the time to follow the rules about clearing up after themselves and what rubbish goes in which bin. I get the sense, in fact, that the owners demand a kind of environmental conscientiousness from their customers which most hotels don't. My room is a decent-sized double at the top of the building with a tiny balcony looking down on the frenetic street below. The myriad awards on the wall downstairs become all the more believable. The last time I was in a hostel was in Cairns, Australia, aged 21, and all





see some if you like?"

I nod, intrigued, and think little more of it. A couple of hours later I return from my first exploration around the picturesque ancient streets of adjacent neighbourhoods, Chiado and Baixa.

"Excellent, you're back!" Enrique says. "Mama has invited you to dinner!"

"What?" I say. My mother's here? And she's... "Just around the corner is Home Hostel," he explains. "Mama cooks every night there for all her guests. They eat like one big family. Traditional Portuguese food."

It would be both rude and unadventurous to turn down such an authentically Iberian invitation so I take a shower and head over. On the way I drop into another recommended nearby hostel - Living Lounge - for a quick tour. Just when I thought it couldn't get more impressive... This one is both opposite the Baixa Chiado Metro station on the Rua Crucifixo, and near the river and trendy shops. It's one of a duo of hostels (including the similarly-named Lisbon Lounge) owned by a group of Portuguese artists who have themselves designed both properties. Every room is

different, with flashes of colour, trilby hats artwork and thoughtprovoking slogans just a few of the quirks.

Quite honestly, I've

got hostel envy, but I have to go. I have a dinner date at Home House, which is also lovely - decorated with dark wood panelling and boasting air conditioning and hairdryers! I slip self-consciously into a corner seat and start reading. Within minutes, however, I'm asked to move. Everybody eats together, I'm told. It makes more space and... well, it's just what Home House dinners are about. And at €10 for three courses and wine, it's difficult to protest. I am sat next to two Irish travellers in the midst of a grand European tour. The atmosphere is relaxed as all 50 of us line up to be served each course by La Mama (a grandmother) herself. It takes three hours for us to make our way through pea soup, roast chicken and biscuit ice cream (traditionally Portuguese, really?), and it's nearly midnight when I leave my new friends, who have tried and failed to drag me to a club.

For a nightcap, head to Barrio Alto and Principe Real where the gay vibe is strongest

Early next morning, pockets stuffed with maps and must-see-and-do suggestions courtesy of Travellers House staff, I start with a trip up the Rua Augusta Arch (€2.50). After a few quiet minutes marvelling at Lisbon's historic red-roofed buildings I head down and stroll over to Cais do Sodré station to catch a train to the fishing village of Cascais recommended by hostel staff. It's a bit of a tourist trap and I'm underwhelmed, though the sardines at Taberna do Lipe on Rua das Flores are excellent value, taste delicious and tick the local delicacy box. That afternoon I return to central Lisbon and wander through the districts of Alfama (narrow streets, beautiful architecture) and Barrio Alto (hilly and hip).

Dinner that evening at the Mercado de Ribiera is a major highlight. The perfect place for a single traveller to dine, it's been the city's main market since 1892 but this year was taken over by Time Out and pulled into the gastronomic fold with various stalls serving authentic, well-sourced and slightly over-







priced food (think: London's Borough Market with seats). For a nightcap, head to Barrio Alto and Principe Real where the gay vibe is strongest. It's a mixed crowd, though, and Lisbon's girls' scene can be quite fly-by-night, so the best thing to do is rock up somewhere known for being lesbian-friendly like Purex (lesbianpickup.com/listings/purex-club) and ask where everyone goes. **•**

During winter, temperatures in Lisbon drop almost as fast as the prices. If you're not put off by chilly nights and quieter streets, December to March is a great time to visit. Direct flights to Lisbon operate from London, Manchester, Liverpool, Edinburgh and Bristol with TAP Portugal, BA, EasyJet and Ryanair.















GET IT ON IN WASHINGTON

ADRIENNE JORDAN FINDS THE AMERICAN CAPITAL AWASH WITH LBT OPTIONS...

For those of us who love a White House television drama, the US capital may be the centre of the narrative world but there's more to Washington, DC than just politics, politics and more politics. First, it's got some beautiful 19th century architecture and scenic rivers to stroll by, but most importantly, there's a year-round party scene that simply must be sampled...

STAY

If you want to be close to DC attractions and nightlife, you can't beat Donovan House (donovanhousehotel.com), situated on the south side of Thomas Circle and offering robust views of the 19th century gothic Martin Luther Church and General George Henry Thomas statue. Ride the elevator to the penthouse and a swanky rooftop is unveiled, complete with a sizeable pool, LA-style cabanas, and bar-side views of the US Capitol. Complimentary Kimptonbranded bikes make eco-treks around the area an easy task. The recently renovated guestrooms include elaborate cocoon showers designed by Studio GAIA, futuristic club chairs, and a pull-out chenille sofa-bed. Not quite a presidential suite but very original, to say the least...

PLAY

Tourists usually make a bee-line for the National Mall (nps.gov/nama) so they can soak up US history and culture. It's definitely worth doing, and around the Mall you can take part in guided tours of Washington, DC landmarks like the White House and Capitol and also visit some of the world-famous Smithsonian museums (si.edu), which rival the best museum collections in the world and entry is free! In March and April, the National Cherry Blossom Festival is celebrated around the Mall, where pretty pink flowers are in bloom along the Potomac River. The Shaw/U Street area of DC, is a great place for drinking in the bars and theatres where great American musicians like Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong used to perform (including the Lincoln Theatre and Bohemian Caverns). For hipster chicks who dig one-of-a-kind shopping there's Eastern Market (easternmarket-dc.org), a large flea market open every Sunday with indoor and outdoor vendors, flanked by creative boutiques and consignment shops.

Washington, DC offers a plethora of lesbiancentred events throughout the year. Capital Pride (capitalpride.org/parade) draws 150,000 people every June. If you're into jelly wrestling

(yes, really) then head to one of the oldest lesbian bars in the country, Phase 1 (phase1dc. com) every second Wednesday. The same bar also holds Flannel Fridays every first Friday, and girlie music performances on the weekends, with the likes of Hunter Valentine and Sick of Sarah. Next, there's Dupont Circle, where the LGBT Washington, DC community lives and breathes. Here, lesbian party Bare takes place at Cobalt every third Saturday (outragedc.com/ bare-by-lure). The Ask Rayceen Show is a free LGBT event hosted monthly by Rayceen Pendarvis at Liv nightclub (livdc.com) on U Street NW and well worth a look. The show includes talent competitions, music performances and comedy troupes. Also, don't forget to drop into Nellie's Sports Bar & Grill (nelliessportsbar.com) - one of the hottest hang-outs for the mixed LGBT crowd. On Sundays the bar throws a drag brunch and hosts football parties weekly during the football season. What more could you ask for to follow up a Saturday night out in the President's home town?

British Airways, United, Delta and Lufthansa are just some of the many airlines that fly direct from London Heathrow to Washington Dulles airport. •



BRAND NEW

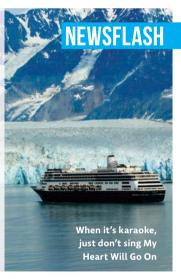
GETA-WAY

The Gay European Tourist Association (GETA) travel service has joined forces with the UK Foreign Commonwealth Office to launch a new travel advice section on its website. There's a map explaining the differences in legal and social attitudes to homosexuality across Western, Central and Eastern Europe. They've also established a Gay Families Tourism Campaign, the aim of which is to persuade European countries, regions and cities to proclaim recognition of the legal rights of gay visitors from around the world. Be informed before you travel.

geta-europe.org gov.uk/knowbeforeyougo

LESBIAN WINTER CRUISE

Olivia Travel's all-women, sevenday Alaskan cruise will take you from the city of Vancouver for a ride along the historic narrowgauge Skagway railway. Focusing on Alaska's culture, food and wildlife, highlights include a stop in Glacier Bay where you'll visit the highest mountain peaks and greenest rainforests in North America, and see bald eagles, whales and bears! Price ranges from £811-£1,748. All details can be found on olivia.com.





CORNISH CRISTMAS BREAKS

Bet you never dreamt of a Nordic Christmas experience in Cornwall? At Cornish holiday resort Gwel an

Mor you can stay in Scandinavian-style lodges and mix cultural festive references until the reindeer come home... Highlights will include log fires, the crisp coastal air and Atlantic waves of Portreath and some traditionally Cornish lantern parades.

gwelanmor.com



| SCENE | CHELMSFORD |

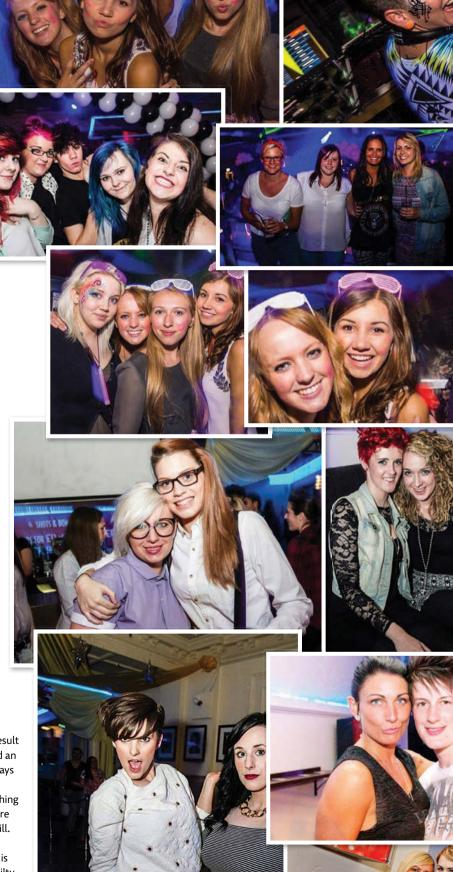


BECAUSE EVERYONE NEEDS A BIT OF CHEESE NOW AND AGAIN...

G Sundays at Chicagos in Chelmsford is the biggest gay night in Essex, going strong for over 12 years. Bank holiday weekends see crowds of up to a thousand revellers, the result of a winning formula of excellent music and an "anything goes" attitude. A night at G Sundays is a night to remember - and everyone's welcome. Gay, straight, bi, trans and everything in between, you're invited to come as you are and dance your socks off. And dance you will. With music to suit every taste - including a healthy portion of cheese – the dancefloor is rarely empty, and no one will judge your guilty pleasure. What are you waiting for? The only way is Essex. chicagosbars.co.uk/venues/

chelmsford **D**







MY SCENE: BIRMINGHAM



Sophie Spiers, 21 "I am a student who loves writing, travelling, and any dish that includes prawns!"

BEST PLACE TO PARTY

The Nightingale Club is the go-to party place for LGBT people and their friends. Three huge floors of dancing and club nights that can go on until 6am has made Nightingale's a hotspot destination for Brummies. Then after Niahtinaale's shuts, everyone usually makes their way to Bar Jester to keep the party going. nightingaleclub.co.uk |

BEST PLACE TO PULL

The Fox is Birmingham's only bar strictly for lesbians. Sidewalk is a warehouse bar with a San Francisco feel to it, which also attracts a big lesbian crowd. thefoxbar.co.uk |

BEST PLACE TO STAY

The Hyatt Regency is a beautiful, modern hotel with a great central location. However, if you're on a budget then the Middleton Hall Hotel is a good gay-owned B&B just five miles outside the centre.

birmingham.regency.hyatt.co.uk

BEST PLACE FOR A ROMANTIC DATE

The Loft Lounge has great food, stylish and chic decor, and a chilled-out atmosphere perfect for a romantic date. Or, if you are both fans of exotic food, then be sure to check out some of the restaurants in Birmingham's Balti Triangle. visitbirmingham.com/eating_out/ balti_triangle | theloftlounge.co.uk

BEST PLACE TO GET SOME FRESH AIR

Sutton Park is a beautiful National Nature Reserve where you can participate in a wide range of activities such as cycling, fishing, and nature-watching. You could also check out Sarehole mill, supposedly the inspiration for JRR Tolkien's Lord of the Rings novels. Tolkien used to play at the mill as a child, and even contributed towards its restoration in the 1960s.

birmingham.gov.uk/suttonpark

WHERE DO YOU GO TO PARTY, PULL, RELAX, **ESCAPE?** *EMAIL LOUISE@DIVAMAG.CO.UK* FOR OUR "MY SCENE" QUESTIONNAIRE



The G Wedding Directory is the newest way to source wedding services for your big day. Check out our online magazine style directory for up-to-the-minute advice from some of the top suppliers and service providers for British weddings.

We are proud to announce that all of the businesses in the directory are either gay or gay friendly.

Wherever you are in the UK, you will be able to find someone who will be more than happy to help you organise your perfect day.

Each month on our website we have features on how to plan different aspects of our wedding, with as little stress as possible, using our nationwide Directory.

Make sure you register your wedding online with us to receive the most up to date information on wedding services in your area and discounts from our suppliers.

You can get the latest tips from Britain's top wedding celebrities on gweddingdirectory.com. Or call us free on 0800 335 7570 to speak to John, our in-house wedding adviser who can help you decide which of the companies from our nationwide directory will work best for you.

To advertise your services on gweddingdirectory.com please call 020 3151 2427

Register your wedding at gweddingdirectory.com

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CLASSIFIED FEATURE - THE BUTCH CLOTHING COMPANY



IN CONVERSATION WITH SHAZ RILEY. OWNER OF THE BUTCH CLOTHING COMPANY



"I spend a good deal of my time these days introducing myself like this: 'Hi, I'm Shaz Riley. I own the Butch Clothing Company.' Well, it's no lie, I do and I am. I have also founded a charity called Out & About, which is now run as part of AgeUK. It's a befriending service for elderly members of our community that we hope will become a national service next year. So I am pretty busy," says entrepreneur Shaz.

"Twenty years ago the BCC wouldn't have become a success. We are, of course, of our time. We live

in a world of internet, which means a global audience. We have widespread legalisation of marriage across the globe and success of women in business at a level unmatched in history. Therefore we have found our niche. Driven to be the 'go-to brand' for gay women," Riley explains.

Why did you start the Butch Clothing Company?

"I was tired of having to purchase ill-fitting men's suits and I knew I wasn't alone. This is what led me to found the company back in the summer of 2009. We spent an intense 10 months in research and development to work out how we could produce perfectly-fitted suits based on classic male styles and the latest male fashion trends. The company was set up for all gay women, not just those that identify as 'butch', but, you see, by calling the company the Butch Clothing Clothing Company every gay woman in the world could and does recognise that we are the company for her. Of course, providing she doesn't want a feminine suit."

The wedding market is big for you. Any advice for those looking for the perfect suit for their big day?

"From a bespoke tailoring perspective, I always say to my clients buying a bespoke suit is an investment, an investment not only in your wedding day but an investment in you for your future. Our suits will last you for the next 20 years. So when we design the perfect suit with you, think about the colours and fabrics you like and how it will work with your existing wardrobe. We encourage clients to think about mixing up the suit after the wedding by wearing the jacket with jeans, the waistcoat with shorts, the trousers with other shirts. We say use it, wear it, enjoy it."

Is it only wedding attire that gay women want?

"No, definitely not. Our clients proudly come from all walks of life. They buy suits for their weddings of course, but also for work and for social occasions. We even have groups of sportswomen who want team blazers. It's all good and it's all go!"

For information about a consultation email: shaz@thebutchclothingcompany.co.uk Or call: 01892 836 936 / 07851 227 669 Facebook - The Butch Clothing Company Twitter @ButchClothing www.thebutchclothingcompany.co.uk







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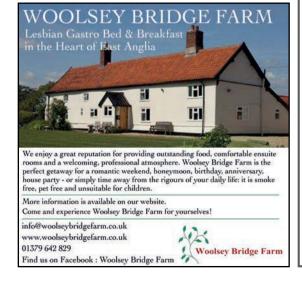
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CLASSIFIED FEATURE - THE KNOLL, LAKESIDE IN THE LAKE DISTRICT

THE PERFECT CHOICE FOR INTIMATE WEDDINGS OR FOR HOUSE PARTIES

As the leaves start to fall and the temperature drops with the winter fast approaching, we thought it was time to catch up with our friends at DIVA magazine and mention what a perfect venue this is for special occasions!

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Of course, if you can't wait for Christmas, what about a lovely autumn or winter break? With gorgeous food, afternoon teas and stunning Lake District scenery to enjoy, you'd be mad not to and we've some great offers on at the moment. Check out our website!

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Pajama Party

I JUST WANTED A ROOMMATE; I DIDN'T NEED ANY TROUBLE... SHORT STORY BY DF COLLIER

In 30 minutes I had looked the place over, signed the lease and moved in with only a suitcase of clothes. I would have to sleep on the floor until my bed was delivered. My new roommate was Angela. She was 25, same as me, and wore her black hair in tiny pre-dreadlocked twists. I had just shaven off my Afro, so my hair was peach-fuzz short.

Angela knocked on my bedroom door and walked in. Her dark skin was smooth; her legs were long and shapely. I could see the imprint of her nipples through her nightgown. I made myself glance away. I just wanted a roommate; I didn't need any trouble.

"You can bunk in my bed until yours is delivered. Sorry I didn't offer sooner." She looked around my bare room and back at me. I was lying on top of a borrowed blanket in a pair of silk shorts and a t-shirt.

"No, it's ok. I only have two more days to go." The uneven floorboards were killing me. I wouldn't last for two days.

"Don't make me feel worse than I already do." She looked embarrassed and smoothed the hem of her gown. "It can be fun. It can be like a pajama party. See, we already have our pajamas."

"Thank you." I had been saved.

I followed Angela down the hallway to her bedroom. The way her hips swung when she walked was mesmerizing. A scented candle burned from her nightstand and cast shadows on the walls. The room smelled like honey.

Angela got in bed, pulled back the covers, and patted the queen-sized bed. I hesitated. Maybe I should have stayed on the floor. What if I accidentally rolled on top of her in my sleep?

"Do you have enough room?" she asked.

"Yes," I said and moved to the edge of the bed. Not being careful was how I'd lost my last flat.

Angela moved closer until her leg, her soft midnight thigh was touching mine. I felt a familiar throb and shut my eyes to quiet the urge. She turned and moved further away. I turned and spooned against her. After all, it was an innocent pajama party. As her breathing synchronised with mine, the places where our skin connected grew hot. The intensity of my throb began to increase until it felt like the energy flowed from my swollen cunt directly to her ass. I took a breath and reminded myself - one wrong move could make me lose my apartment.

Angela pushed her naked body against mine

"I need some water," I mumbled.

I walked to the kitchen and dashed cold drops on my face. Get it under control, get it under control, get it under control, I said to

I stood at the bedroom door. Angela's breathing sounded as if she was asleep. With a sigh of relief, I settled back in bed a proper distance away. As soon as I thought it was safe, Angela pushed her body against mine. This time she was naked.

My resolve was broken; I threw off my clothes. From behind, I stroked her nipples and breathed in faint traces of her perfume. I gently stroked her pubes, enjoying the texture of short, wiry hair. Angela responded with a moan and opened her legs. My own wetness dripped down my thigh. Gently, I slid two fingers between her pussy lips. She twitched as if she was

startled. I suckled her neck between my teeth and pressed my cunt against her ass. With a loud moan, Angela opened her legs wider.

I pushed my fingers into her clenching pussy; it embraced my fingers over and over as if thanking me. She moaned louder and rocked her hips for more. I moaned with her as I gave her more. Each time I thrust my fingers inside, I slammed my cunt against her ass. That felt very good to me. Angela responded with a series of deep-throated moans and raspy breaths.

She moaned in protest as I slid my fingers out but stopped when I put my face between her thighs. My tongue parted her swollen lips; she smelled like rich cocoa butter. I circled her clitoris with the tip of my tongue. I could feel her musky heat rising like steam as her thighs squeezed against my face. As her wetness slid down my neck, I inhaled her scent. The room smelled of sex and honey.

Suddenly Angela moaned, arched her back, and pushed my head down hard. I could barely breathe but it felt good. I placed my mouth firmly over her engorged clitoris and sucked. I pushed three fingers into her slippery opening; she pushed upwards as my mouth pushed her back down. I began fucking her hard. Each time I thrust my fingers inside, my swollen clit felt as if it grew larger. The more she moved away, the tighter I held on.

Angela moaned and her thighs gripped my head like a vice. She couldn't escape, but neither could I. Faster and harder she rocked. faster and harder we fucked. We came loud and furious on the soaked wet sheets.

Angela slept in my arms as I shook thoughts of the past out of my head. This time would be different. **O**



AS NEW FILM TRU LOVE CELEBRATES THE LATE-BLOOMING LESBIAN, ANNA SANSOM SPOKE TO DIVA READERS ABOUT COMING LATE TO LESBIAN SEX

Kate Johnston and Shauna MacDonald's new lesbian romance movie, Tru Love, features an older and recently widowed woman exploring her sexual attraction for a younger lesbian. Kate told DIVA: "I wanted to write a love letter to life itself. We tend to desexualise women as they get older but it's never too late to start again and it's never too late to love again." (You can read a full interview with Kate and Shauna on the DIVA website tinyurl.com/ DIVATru.) To coincide with the release of Tru Love, Anna Sansom asked DIVA readers about coming out in their 40s and 50s and being a late-blooming lesbian.

"I was born for lesbian sex!" says Sarn, age 45. However, it wasn't until she was in her 40s, with a husband and three children, that she began to explore her attractions to women. In a familiar story, Sarn feels that, despite

loving her husband, she had "largely been going through the motions" of heterosexual sex her whole life. Turning 40 and reviewing her life was the catalyst to finding the missing piece of the puzzle that led her to ending her marriage, having same-sex relationships, and feeling she'd "come home" at last.

So how does a woman go from having an established and long-held heterosexual identity to becoming a late-blooming lesbian?

For some, with the benefit of hindsight, early signs of their lesbian potential were evident. "My friends thought the male history teacher was cute; the female French teacher was always my favourite," says Sarn. Others had "schoolgirl crushes" on pop and film stars but felt this was a "normal" part of growing up and not necessarily indicative of future sexuality: "I had a crush on KD Lang in the 80s, but that was never strong enough to make me know I was attracted to women," explains Sarah, 46.

The signs of same-sex attraction when growing up may have been too subtle or, sadly, too difficult for some to act upon: "At 15 I knew I was gay and tried to talk to my mum about it. But I was told not to entertain that idea. At 15 I didn't have the confidence to make my own gay way." Preferring to remain anonymous in this interview, this 48-year-old told us that having counselling in her early 40s enabled her to finally embrace her true sexuality; an experience that, for her, was "not a revelation, but a liberation".

The connections between sexual identity, behaviour and attraction can be complex and sometimes contradictory. Being in a relationship with a male partner who wanted a

threesome with two women gave Lesley, 55, an opportunity to act on her same-sex attraction. "I was always watching the women in sex scenes in movies. When I had threesomes with the man I was with and a girl, I really wasn't interested in the male part, it was the girls that excited me." Mary, 51, sees her experience differently. "I've probably always been queer, although sexually, to all intents and purposes, I was straight. I commonly fantasised about women and saw this as entirely natural as a straight woman. I had been in a relationship with a man for over 11 years when I fell head over heels for my first woman."

Sometimes falling for a woman seemed to come out of the blue. Michelle Macfarlane, 46, believed she was straight and was established in life with her husband and children. When she began to develop feelings for her (lesbian) au pair, it took her by surprise, was both "amazing and disturbing", and turned her life upside down. Their first kiss "made me wobbly. I thought I knew myself then – wow! – this feels incredibly beautiful". And there was no going back; she left her husband, married the au pair, and wrote a book about the whole experience (aptly titled, I Left My Husband For The Au Pair).

Although meeting another woman and falling in love was the drive for some of those interviewed, finding a same-sex sexual partner came later for others. When Lindie, 40, realised that becoming a mother still didn't fill "the empty feeling I had inside me" and finally stopped "blocking out the thought that I might actually be gay" she turned to an

online forum of other women who felt they might also be living a lie within their heterosexual marriages. Online dating sites were also a port of call for several of the women interviewed; sometimes seeking out support there, and sometimes a sexual partner to "test the waters" with. Inevitably, as new relationships were formed, previous ones ended. "I was married to a lovely man. I loved him and still do but was never in love with him. I wish I could have got here without hurting someone else so much," says Justine, 44. "I had spent the last 10 years avoiding sex with my husband. [With a woman] I went from no orgasm to multiple orgasms, from dry and painful to wet and slippery. I felt I was 'home'. There was no doubt at all about what had been wrong with me: I wasn't frigid, I was a lesbian."

"I was born for lesbian sex!"

Before having sex with another woman, some of those interviewed had looked to lesbian erotica and porn. Finding genuine lesbian porn (not that intended for a male audience) was helpful. "It really helped give a sense of what's 'normal' in lesbian sex – answer: everything!" says Mary. Erotica was another useful source of information and one late-bloomer referenced Felice Newman's Whole Lesbian Sex Book as her research source of choice. Any initial anxieties about "how to do lesbian sex" were generally easily overcome. "I felt nervous that I'd do it all wrong but once she kissed me it all seemed to flow so naturally,"

says Julie, 45. Following your lover's lead, doing to her what you know you like for yourself, and asking for instructions, were all successful strategies for first-time lesbian sex. "It was absolutely amazing to be with another woman," says Jayne, 46, "when we climaxed we held each other so tight, it felt like we were melting into each other." And for Lesley, 55: "The feeling when I first put my fingers inside her vagina was the most erotic experience I have ever had in my whole life. Nothing compares to making love to a woman."

To any woman questioning whether to follow her later-life lesbian desires, the resounding advice given by our readers is to go for it. "Don't wait too long; don't waste your life being something you're not. I'm so proud to be a lesbian now," says Jayne. That said, "Don't do anything you don't feel ready to do," advises Sarn. She reassures: "If you choose to follow what lies within you, then the kids will be alright, your husband will be alright. If any of your friends dump you then they aren't real friends." And there's one more note of caution from Mary. "Don't think a lesbian relationship will necessarily be any different from a straight one; there can be just as many angsts and insecurities, just as much heartbreak and pain. Oh, and remember: short nails; remove your rings!" •

Tru Love is out on DVD and On-Demand from Peccadillo Pictures. You can order from DIVADirect.co.uk and other good retailers. Watch the trailer on YouTube: tinyurl.com/DIVATruLove



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DV 736789

CHEEKY, LOVII

F, 52, feminine, likes meals out, football & walks. Seeks F for good times & r/ship. Lancs. Box 794840

F, 40, likes laughs & nights out. Seeks similar F for fun & f/ship+. Mancs. Box 583561

CARING & LOYAL

Gay F, 58, smoker, seeks special feminine gay lady for a close r/ship. Mansfield/Notts. Box 132991 ☑ DV 132991

HAPPY, BI-CLIRIOUS

F, 48, blonde, loves doing nice things, seeks nice F for socialising, laughs & intimacy. Mancs. Box 115157

F, 49, seeks F, 40-50, with good outlook, for good conversation & plenty of laughs. Mancs. Box 177389 BI-CURIOUS, SOCIABLE

F, 32, likes socialising & partying. Seeks F to see what happens. Ldn. Box 470300

SINCERE, LOVING F, 19, likes the arts & music, looking for caring F for loving r/ship. Humberside. Box 782392 □ DV 782392

SOCIABLE, HONEST F, 19, smoker, social drinker, likes reading & country walks. Seeks F for r/ship. Glocs. Box 454386

OMETHING WONDERFUL F, 22, sociable & sincere, has a cat,

likes gardening & animals. Seeks bubbly F, similar age, for something wonderful. Essex. Box 721492

F, 36, likes cinema & rollerskating. Seeks F for good times & more. E Anglia. Box 538084 RE BLONDE

F, 67, likes gardening & travel. Seeks F, similar age, for close times & more. Ldn Box 898375

BISEXUAL, SINCERE F, 19, single mum, likes walks & FRIENDLY & SOCIABLE

F, 22, single mum, likes cinema & nights out. Seeks F for something special. York. Box 681238 ☑ DV 681238

HONEST, BUTCH

F, 47, loves animals, seeks F for days out & great nights in. Newcastle.

FRY OUTGOING, BLONDE

F, 44, 5'1", likes walks, music & meals out. Seeks F for great times & more. Glasgow. Box 851465

F. 61, lives in S Ldn, seeks F for longterm r/ship. Box 840369

F, 43, seeks F, 30-40, for nights out, walks & real r/ship. Mancs. Box 159732 ⊠ DV 159732 OUTGOING, FUN

F, 44, GSOH, loves travel, seeks F for something intimate & more. Mancs. Box 708904

FUN-LOVING. CARING. GENI IINE

F, young 51, slim build, blonde, GSOH, likes going out/staying in. WLTM sincere F to share life together. Ashton, Box 263699

F, 57, seeks lady, 30-60, for r/ship. Glasgow. Box 161325 LOYAL, KIND, BLUE-

LOYĂL, KIND, BLUE-EYED Blonde, 50, 5'3", likes R&B, animals, cinema & concerts. Seeks kind, reliable, loyal F for something special. Stockport. Box 679774

F. 53. genuine & intelligent, seeks F for f/ship & more. SE Ldn/anywhere.

Box 172274

Box 172274 LOVING, CARING F, 58, likes bingo, reading, meals out & animals. Seeks special F for loving r/ship. Hull. Box 626738

F, 48, 5'4", large build, seeks F for f/ship & hopefully more. Powys.

Box 283445 PASSIONATE WOMAN

Easy-going, attractive bi lady, early 50s, seeks feminine F, size 18+, for fun times. Mancs. Box 823022 Profess F, late 50s, GSOH, many

interests inc travel. WLTM kind, loving, n/s, profess M, 50s-60s, for good r/ship. Chesh. Box 880555 JUST THE TWO OF US

JUST THE TWO OF US Confident, intelligent, profess femme, 35, WLTM others for f/ship, maybe more. Definitely no issues or baggage please. Mids. Box 984967

☑ DV 984967

LOUD, PROUD, CONFIDENT

LOUD, PROUD, CONFIDENT F, 40, bubbly, likes dance & films. Seeks F for wild nights out & passionate nights in. Milton Keynes. Box 273975 ⋈ DV 273975 FUN, TOMBOY

F, 36, likes football, cinema & nights out. Seeks feminine F, 30-40, for r/ship. Mancs. Box 798661

F, 53, likes walks, shopping, meals out & pubs. Seeks F for f/ship & more. Lancs. Box 179437 DV 179437

DARK-HAIRED, SOCIABLE

F, 45, 5'1", medium build, likes socialising, travel & motorbikes. Seeks similar F for r/ship. W Ldn, Surrey. Box 187431 ⊠ DV 187431

GROUNDED, PROFESS F, 42, 5'7", brown hair, blue eyes, enjoys places of interest & weekend breaks/travel. WLTM older F for loving LTR. Shrops, Box 903873 ⊠ DV 903873

NO STRINGS

SENSUAL, FEMININE

F, 43, bisexual, seeks similar F for sensuality & experimentation. S Ldn.

Box 591109 OING, SOCIAL

F. 35. likes concerts, shopping & meals out. Seeks feminine F for fun times. Mancs. Box 123477 ONG BLONDE HAIR

F, 36, genuine, broad-minded, enjoys swimming, music & horse-riding, seeks F for fun times. Suffolk.

Box 255518

Box 255518
NEW TO THIS
Inexperienced F, 51, seeks F for fun
times. Soton. Box 467075
ATTRACTIVE FEMME
Bi F, 49, 572", size 12, short auburn
hair. Seeks nice, open-minded bi F
for no strings fun. Ldn. Box 298015 ☑ DV 298015

JUST FRIENDS

Animal-loving F, 33, seeks friends for socialising, laughter, intelligent conversation & a little bit of mischief. Somerset. Box 757543 ⊠ DV 757543

F, 48, likes the outdoors & learning Spanish. Seeks Fs for chats & genuine f/ship. Ldn. Box 359170

F, 52, loves animals, drives, gigs & travel. Seeks Fs for socialising & f/ ship. Kent. Box 491009 DV 491009

DOUBLES

Fabulous, 50s, WLTM similar. Enjoy the good things in life, from wining to dining, shopping, theatre & dog walks. Berks. Box 877786 M DV 877786

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ALENA DIERICKX CONSIDERS DEPRESSION AND HOW TO OVERCOME IT

As the seasons change, with more darkness and shorter, colder days, many of us feel our moods dip. So often we're told how we lesbian and bisexual women have poorer mental health than our hetero mates. This is hardly surprising in increasingly right-wing, recession-hit times. LGBTQI funding has been drying up too and many of us really are left to fend for ourselves.

The British Association of Counsellors and Psychotherapists – the industry's regulatory body - recently doled out the usual advice about managing depression; suggesting exercise, eating and sleeping well, talking to people and making yourself get outside and do things even if that depressive pull makes you feel like resisting all of these healthy habits. Although these suggestions often do help, we all respond differently to the experience of depression and our material and social circumstances play a big part in whether or not we can cope. If depression was that easy to move on from, there wouldn't be an issue!

Existential psychologist Rollo May once said that depression is the inability to construct a future. My own history of depression and my work with clients who experience depression is that this is a valid description for many of us. It's very difficult, though, to just get out there and talk to people when

you feel like the world is a black, vacuous and empty place that you don't belong in, because we fear friends, partners and family don't usually want to hear about it, and definitely not more than once.

Depression, in my view, is a natural part of life

There can also be feelings of shame or guilt about "dumping your stuff" on others. Personcentred psychologist Carl Rogers believed that because we are often not accepted for who we truly are as children we learn to construct a false self to please others and get what we need in life one way or another. This creates an incongruent self that can never be happy or contented until we learn how to match our feelings and desires with our actions and with what we say to others. This is why talking in a group setting about depression is so helpful, because we can learn about how we impact on others and how to develop greater self awareness about ourselves and other people.

However, because depression is mostly constructed as an abnormality or a dysfunction of sorts, despite most people experiencing it at

some point in their life, we often overlook the obvious. Depression, in my view, is a natural part of life. How could we not be depressed at times? Look around the world at what's going on, only the truly disassociated could be permanently positive in the face of all the wars, displacement and destruction. But it's one side of a coin. The beautiful, mysterious and unexpected things in life are also there but in a depressive state they are hidden from view. Depression, then, is often a perspective; a way of being.

Referring to distressed mental states as "life without feeling alive", psychiatrist RD Laing described an experience that is common to many of us but it isn't necessarily a permanent situation. Nothing stays the same and we can decide to change the way we feel, even if it takes a while and we don't know how. In my worst depressions it took over a year to really start to feel better and for many it's a lot longer but support, particularly in a group, can speed up that process. Groups have gone out of fashion a bit but, in these very individualist times, I really believe that group support is needed so that we can not only gain an understanding of our own feelings of aloneness but also understand what it's like for others and feel that we may be able to extend empathy and support to them through our own experiences of depression, too. We are relational beings and we need each other to become all we are capable of being. •

Alena Dierickx is a qualified, BACP registered therapist doing creatively focused one-to-one and group work in the King Cross and Old Street areas of London. For further info email alena.dierickx@gmail.com counselling-directory.org.uk/ counsellors/alena-dierickx

DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY

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See our Equal marriage campaign http://equalmarriagecampaign.wordpress.com/

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51% of people calling us are homeless.

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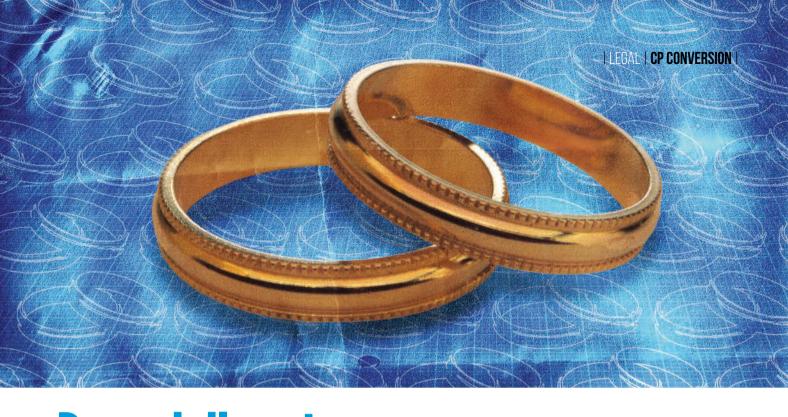
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Dear civil partner, will you marry me?

THINKING OF CONVERTING YOUR CIVIL PARTNERSHIP INTO A MARRIAGE?
LAILA BHUNNOO EXPLAINS WHY YOU MIGHT WANT TO AND WHAT HAPPENS NEXT



From December, samesex couples who are in civil partnerships will be able to apply to convert their CPs to marriages, if they wish. While many civil partners are happy

to remain as such, others keenly await the opportunity to become legally married.

Why would a same-sex couple want to marry or convert their partnership to a marriage?

There are several advantages; marriages can be conducted through either a civil ceremony or a religious ceremony (if the religious organisation has solemnised marriages of same-sex couples), whereas a civil partnership is entirely a civil event with no religious aspect to it.

For many, marriage holds an emotional resonance which civil partnership may not.

In some countries, same-sex marriages are legal, and civil partnerships are not given the same status as marriage. If you and your partner were planning to live abroad, you might choose marriage over civil partnership.

With civil partnership regulations, gender and orientation are the deciding factors in which relationships are legally recognised, unlike in a marriage. Since civil partnerships are only available to those in same-sex relationships, when completing official forms, ticking the "civil partnership" box shows that you are with a partner of the same sex, whereas if you tick the box which states you are married, that could mean you are in either in a same-sex or an opposite-sex relationship.

If you are thinking of converting, how and when can civil partners convert to a samesex marriage?

If you registered your civil partnership in England and Wales (or overseas in a consulate or armed forces base) before 29 March 2014, when same-sex marriages came into force, you can convert your civil partnership to a marriage from 10 December 2014. The advantage of going through the conversion process in the first year is that you do not have to pay the £45 fee. After 9 December 2015, the fee is payable even if you registered before 29 March 2014.

So what do you need to do to convert?

You can convert your civil partnership into a marriage at a different registry office to the one you registered your civil partnership in.

• Both you and your partner must attend an appointment, in person.

- You will both need proof of identity.
- You will both need proof of address.
- You will also need proof of your civil partnership registration.
- You and your partner will then sign a declaration that you have not previously dissolved the civil partnership and that you both would like to convert it to a marriage. The conversion is then complete.
- The declaration must be signed at the registry office.
- The conversion will be registered and a certificate of conversion issued.

(There is also a possibility that a superintendent registrar may interview each partner.)

The marriage will be backdated to when you entered into the civil partnership, which I am sure will come as a relief for those who have difficulty remembering significant dates!

There is no official ceremony attached to the conversion but that should not stop you from having a celebration to mark this important occasion, the result of an extraordinary landmark in LGB rights.

Laila Bhunnoo is a partner with Hodge Jones & Allen Solicitors, specialists in family law. lbhunnoo@hja.net



We wish you an appy Christmas

RHODA MEEK SHARES HER TIPS TO HELPS YOU MAKE LIGHT OF CHRISTMAS SHOPPING

Christmas, It's here again. My sister finished her festive shopping in May. Suffice it to say, I haven't even started. Living 40 miles off-shore I have, however, spent the last few years perfecting the art of online shopping and for you, my loyal readers, I have picked some of my favourite, tech-based shortcuts (see right).

PS: Happy Christmas!



Parcel delivery tracking tinyurl.com/ **DIVAParcel**

Sleeps til Christmas Countdown (with music and Christmas characters and a countdown to

the last second :-)) tinyurl.com/DIVASleeps

TIMEWASTERS

Keep an eye on Santa as he travels at google.co.uk/ santatracker, or waste valuable Christmas shopping time by playing Santa Dives: santadive.withgoogle.com.





Rhoda Meek is an IT consultant and designer with a social media addiction. a crochet habit, a RaspberryPi and two left feet. wodieskodie.com @wodieskodie

WHAT ARE YOUR **FAVOURITE LIFE** HACKS? LET ME KNOW! geek@divamag.co.uk



Gift It is exactly that, a gift for the hard of planning. This free iOS app lets you create Christmas lists and keep a running total of the amount you are spending on each person. Happily, the app is free, however, to password protect lists and remove ads will cost you some pennies. As an added bonus, it will tell you how many nights there are until Christmas. tinyurl.com/DIVAGiftIt



My family are all hard to buy for. My dad is allergic to sports, aftershave and most socks - and he's the easiest to satisfy. Enter the Thoughtful Gift Finder. Created by notonthehighstreet.com, it does your thinking for you, although the price point is a little high. Think of it as inspiration rather than the answer to all your shopping problems.

tinyurl.com/DIVAThoughtful (iOS. Free.)

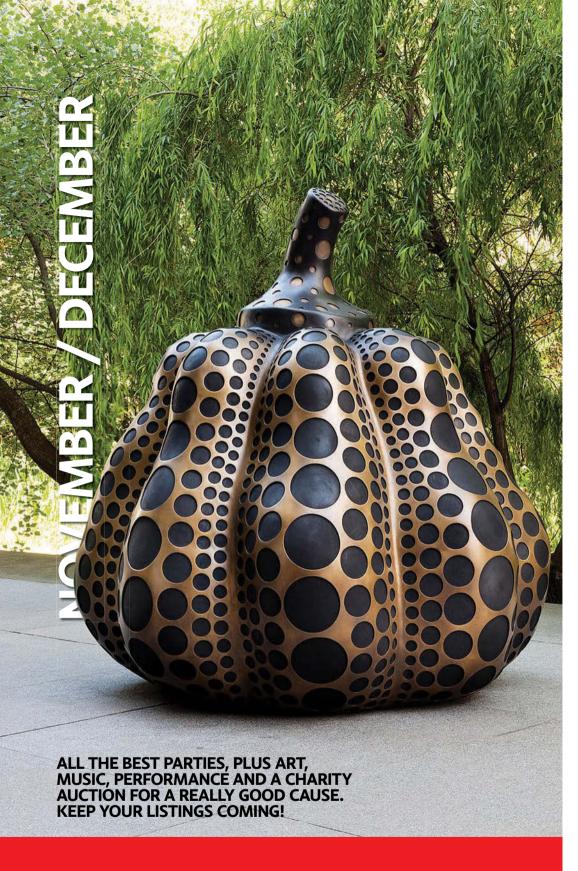


I know this internet giant has a world of ethical discussions attached, but the Amazon app is an obvious one. You can browse and shop by department, and it also lets you compare prices, find deals and read what other people have to say about the product you are looking at. A little-known feature is the ability to scan a barcode to see information on pricing and availability. Handy if you want to compare prices whilst out doing realworld shopping. amazon.co.uk (iOS, Android, Blackberry. Free.)

THANKS TO ALL WHO ANSWERED THE CALL FOR WEBSITES TO SHOWCASE. KEEP 'EM COMING!

Laura Ghafoor's blog is called I Think It's That Way; Finding the Way Around My Twenties. She describes it as "a selection of scribbles with my comments on all things LGBT, tea and cakes, music stuff I like and anything else". ishoutwhenimeantowhisper.blogspot.co.uk

Dawn Vincent writes a blog post every Friday, and whilst the topic tends to differ every week, previous topics include cats, health and fitness, feminism, LGBT issues and writing. Check out Losing the Plot at dawnvincentisawriter.wordpress.com.



Until 19.12

ORANGE SOUASH

VICTORIA MIRO GALLERY, LONDON

A major new series of Yayoi Kusama's bronze sculptures. The bronze pumpkins have been two years in the making and mark the first time Kusama has worked with the material on such a large scale.

victoria-miro.com

Until 01.02

YOU'VE TORN YOUR DRESS

V & A MUSEUM, LONDON From suffragette teapots to protest robots, Disobediant Objects is the first exhibition to examine the powerful role of objects in movements for social change. It demonstrates how political activism subverts standard definitions of art and design. Don't miss.

27.11

THE WAIN ATTRACTION

QUEEN ELIZABETH HALL, LONDON Martha Wainwright, her with the tortured songs and famous fam, is coming to the UK to charm us with that riotous blend of thoughtful folk/pop.

marthawainwright.com

28.11

QUEER FACTOR

RVT, LONDON

Push the Button is London's most ridiculous and sincere pop night since 2010. Expect Robyn and Gaga, Aqua and Schlager – and possibly the Brookside theme. Because sometimes you just want to dance to Rachel Stevens and lip-sync to Billie Piper.

rvt.org.uk

1.12

TICKLED

THE BLUECOAT, LIVERPOOL
Jess Thom has tourettes, a condition that makes her say "biscuit"
16,000 times a day. This twowoman solo show weaves comedy, puppetry, singing, and incredible tics to explore spontaneity, creativity, disability and things you never knew would make you laugh. Backstage in Biscuitland is part of DaDaFest International 2014, the best of disability and deaf arts.

dadafest.co.uk

2-4.12

DED THE POADDS

FRED'S SHED, STRATFORD UPON AVON Originally researched, writ-

WHAT'S HAPPENING WHERE YOU ARE? Send your listings to dora@divamag.co.uk For weekly listings, visit divamag.co.uk

ten and produced for the 2013 SHOUT Festival of queer arts in Birmingham, The Lasting Sense of Sudden is based on real life coming out experiences collected by theatre company FRED in Birmingham and the West Midlands.

fred-theatre.co.uk

RAPTURE, MANCHESTER L Festive is wrapped up as one big winter ball to celebrate the L Fest Awards. A ticket bags you live music, DJs till late and a hot meal.

lfest.co.uk/l-festive

10.12

AQUUM, LONDON

Champagne and canapé dos for the bi woman who's done with cheap lemonade in Vogue Fabrics and Robyn, again. This is "sumptuous décor" and "imaginative cocktails", this is "Dress Code: Sexy/Stylish", this is the "cool and sophisticated feel of the West End" in Clapham. Yes, Clapham. elysionevents.co.uk

12.12

CONTACT THEATRE, MANCHESTER Mother's Ruin returns to kick off the Christmas season with a gold clad procession of kitsch, darkness and bat-winged transcendence. Plant your queer self down and receive.

contactmcr.com

TROXY, LONDON Sink the Pink are throwing a modest get together to mark the Christmas season. There has been talk of dancing? But it hasn't been confirmed. Two cat-

egories are rumoured: Camp as Christmas and Fire and Ice. May that indicate that homosexuals will be putting on clothes... and possibly vuh vuh vogueing? tinvurl.com/DIVASinkPink

THE BIG TOP

SECRET LOCATION, BRISTOL Immersive entertainment from professional networkers Indigo. The Night Circus is in town for a night only. To find it, you must follow your Victorian guide through the moonlight. Monochrome dress encouraged. Those with a dislike for audience participation, steer clear. indigonetwork.co.uk/

the-night-circus

WHITE CLOTH GALLERY, LEEDS Bid for a unique piece of art by one of 100 local artists at this charity auction in aid of No Going Back, which provides free specialist legal representation to LGBT people who have fled their country because they have suffered persecution.

nogoingback.org.uk

HUSH YOUR MOUTH

THE QUEENSHILLING, BRISTOL Fresh-faced with a hint of swagger, the all lesbian team behind Hush promise playful pop, dancefloor indie and RnB beats cherry-picked by the best female DJS in the south-west.

queenshilling.com **20.12**

BUTCH CASSIDY

UNDERGROUND THEATRE. **EASTBOURNE**

The Lezzwood Players just want to please. Their show wildly crosses genres incorporating murder mystery, the western and musical comedy, all for your delight. Be upstanding for country classics such as Stand by Your Dyke. undergroundtheatre.co.uk

VENUE TBA, LONDON

Join a friendly, dressed-up crowd for drinks, dinner and dancing to classic soul, R&B, reggae and hip-hop at Colourfulpink's Winter Party. Plus live entertainment from FS1.

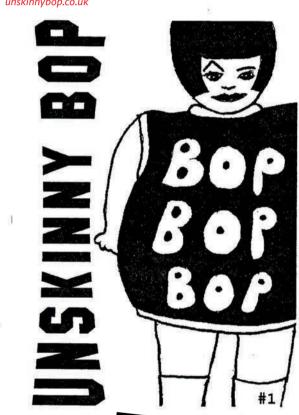
colourfulpink.com

20.12

THE STAR OF BETHNAL GREEN, LONDON

The disco: vintage/queer. The dancefloor: all inclusive. The Bop? Unskinny, baby! This is a party that takes its pop very, very seriously and doesn't mind a binary if that binary is butch/femme and the girls are glam and the boys are misunderstood.

unskinnybop.co.uk



EVERYTHING MUST GO

BETHNAL GREEN WORKING MEN'S CLUB, LONDON

Third edition of the Hot! Fresh! Edgy! Cool! Deep Trash Italia ft Ready-to-wear happiness, all-you-can-eat disposable relationships, work exploitation, CCTV surveillance and credit card slavery... this party is Not For Sale. Soundtrack: TRASH 'N' FRESH from Disco to present.

tinyurl.com/DIVADeepTrash







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Sun 30 Nov

GFT & Glasgow Women's Library

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Duke of York's Brighton The Midwich Cuckoos Live Fri 5 Dec **Broadway Nottingham**

The Created Woman: Solaris, Stepford Wives and Weird Science Fri 5 – Sun 7 Dec

Arnolfini Bristol

Neural Geometry movie marathon Sun 14 Dec

Chapter, Cardiff Barbarella Sun 14 + Tue 16 Dec

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